

Enabling Disciplined Initiative: An Experiential Lesson

A Monograph

by

MAJ James C. Wiltse
United States Army



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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Name of Candidate: MAJ James C. Wiltse
Monograph Title: Enabling Disciplined Initiative: An Experiential Lesson

Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Mark T. Calhoun, PhD

_____, Seminar Leader
Kevin P. Romano, COL

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Henry A. Arnold III, COL

Accepted this 26th day of May 2016 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

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Abstract

Enabling Disciplined Initiative: An Experiential Lesson, by MAJ James C. Wiltse, 72 pages.

Ulysses S. Grant's early career demonstrates a correlation between learning agility and the mission command principle: exercise disciplined initiative. Application of experiential learning theory during historical analysis of operational commanders that served in the Pacific Theater during World War II (WWII) provides a means to prioritize education and training experiences that enable the exercise of disciplined initiative. Chronological study of Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher and General Walter Krueger's preparation before WWII, and each leader's actions after December 7, 1941 identifies how each officer developed and leveraged mental agility, people agility, change agility, results agility, and self-awareness. As their cases show, experiential learning that takes place during large-scale military exercises, diverse assignment opportunities, balanced military education, and rigorous self-study enables the continuous growth of learning agility and the exercise of disciplined initiative.

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Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
AWC	US Army War College
CGSC	US Army Command and General Staff College
CINCUS	Commander and Chief US Fleet
CINCPAC	Commander and Chief Pacific Fleet
ELM	Kolb's Experiential Learning Model
GHQ	General Headquarters
FM	Field Manual
JP	Joint Publication
JPC	Army and Navy Planning Committee
NWC	US Naval War College
SECNAV	Secretary of the Navy
SOPA	South Pacific Area
SWPA	Southwest Pacific Area

Introduction

One of my superstitions is that when I started to go anywhere, to do anything, not to turn back until what I started doing was accomplished.

— Ulysses S. Grant

Background

Ulysses S. Grant's actions in the US Civil War's Western Theater demonstrate the longstanding tradition of US Army commanders exercising disciplined initiative. Grant's success as a military commander resulted from lifelong learning through experience. In childhood, Grant was quiet, sensitive to bloodshed, often naive, but capable of determination in tough situations. During his military education at West Point, some of Grant's peers considered him lazy and neglectful of his studies based on his poor performance in military theory and strategy. However, fellow cadets also recognized his perceptiveness, which enabled him to act after only minimal preparation.¹

Grant first experienced combat as a member of the Fourth Infantry Regiment during the Mexican-American War. During the conflict, his duty as Regimental adjutant and logistics officer did not require service near the front, yet he always ended up in the fight. As logistics officer, Grant innovated to maintain operational reach and momentum for his unit. During the war, he observed the leadership of Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. Learning from both officers, he emulated Taylor's "Old Rough and Ready" persona and incorporated many of Scott's civil military ideas during the US Civil War. In Mexico, Grant also built relationships with other

¹ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (New York: C. L. Webster, 1885), 17-35; William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 1-27; Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 1-17.

officers, and used his interactions to guide his future decisions when confronted by those that later joined the Confederacy.²

In 1854, Grant left the Army to be closer to his family. As a civilian, Grant experienced multiple business failures to include farming and selling real estate. He learned from these shortcomings, in part because of the encouragement he received from family members who held an unwavering belief in him. On the eve of the US Civil War, Grant volunteered for service in the Union Army, gaining appointment in June 1861 as Colonel of a Regiment of Illinois volunteers. Grant displayed a high capacity to exercise disciplined initiative during his early actions in the US Civil War's Western Theater. Before he joined the Union ranks, some in the Confederate Army regarded Grant as clear-headed, quick, and daring.³

Grant lived up to this reputation in his next position, serving as a newly appointed Brigadier General and commander of the military district of Southeast Missouri. He seized the opportunity to invade Kentucky shortly after receiving information that Confederates had arrived in the neutral state. While under the authority of Major General Fremont, Grant acted in the absence of direct orders. He rapidly maneuvered his forces from Cairo, Illinois and secured Paducah, Kentucky within twenty-four hours on September 6, 1861, establishing Union control of critical rail and inland waterway lines of communication. In February 1862, Grant again exercised initiative by capturing Fort Henry and then Fort Donelson, Tennessee in rapid succession. Major General Henry Halleck, Fremont's replacement as Grant's superior, viewed Grant's offensive mindset as risky and considered relieving him. Unsuspecting of Halleck's

² Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 17-35; McFeely, *Grant*, 28-40; Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 18-47.

³ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 17-35; McFeely, *Grant*, 41-76; Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 78-118; Charles R. Bowery, *The Civil War in the Western Theater 1862* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 13-18.

concerns, Grant acted on his insight that any delay in capturing Fort Donelson risked conceding advantage to the Confederates—an outcome that would not meet President Abraham Lincoln’s intent.⁴

After his rapid campaign to capture Fort Donelson, Grant received accolades from leaders in Washington, DC for his fighting spirit and his demands for unconditional surrender of the enemy. Grant demonstrated significant mental agility during these operations. Never afraid to innovate, he conducted rapid offensive operations while simultaneously learning how to synchronize tactical actions on land with naval forces operating along the Cumberland River—an early example of the US military conducting joint operations. Caught by surprise at Shiloh, Tennessee in April 1862 Grant drew criticism for what some saw as an excessive focus on offensive operations, leading to a poorly prepared defensive position at Pittsburg Landing. Although the Union forces won the Battle of Shiloh, they suffered heavy casualties in an engagement that easily could have turned out very differently. The public and politicians alike blamed Grant, the Union commander, for the heavy cost of the victory.⁵

The events at Shiloh led to a temporary setback in Grant’s career when, in the aftermath of the battle, Halleck combined and reorganized Union forces in the Western Theater. Halleck reduced Grant to second-in-command of his army—a bitter pill to swallow, perhaps, but this did give Grant time to reflect upon his earlier successes and failures. In July 1862, Grant assumed command of the District of West Tennessee as Halleck headed to Washington to take over command of the Union Army. Grant knew that the Confederacy was gaining the initiative in the

⁴ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 160-213; McFeely, *Grant*, 77-110; Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 78-118; Bowery, *The Civil War in the Western Theater 1862*, 13-18.

⁵ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 196-282; McFeely, *Grant*, 111-23. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 119-90; Bowery, *The Civil War in the Western Theater 1862*, 17-29; James R. Arnold, *Grant Wins the War: Decision at Vicksburg* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 52.

Eastern Theater and Lincoln was eager to announce the emancipation of all slaves. To seize the initiative the Union needed a decisive victory. Grant understood that capturing Vicksburg, Mississippi would provide such a victory by gaining Union control of the Mississippi River—a vital logistics and communications route into the interior—while dividing the South in two.⁶

With this in mind, Grant planned a campaign to seize Vicksburg in the fall of 1862. Keeping his leaders in Washington, DC informed of his plans, Grant initially executed a two-pronged approach towards Vicksburg. Initial attempts to take the city ended in failure, but Grant persisted, conducting a number of expeditions to gain access of terrain south of Vicksburg's fortifications along the Mississippi River. Finally, after months of adapting his approach to terrain, weather, and the enemy, Grant landed his army on the eastern bank of the Mississippi River at Bruinsburg, Mississippi on April 30, 1863. Accepting the risk of operating with his line of communications severed, over the next three weeks Grant maneuvered his army inland, winning multiple engagements, capturing the city of Jackson, Mississippi and finally isolating Vicksburg. By early July, 1863 Confederate Army forces at Vicksburg surrendered to Grant's army.⁷ A year later, President Lincoln said "Grant is the first general I have had. The rest wanted me to be general. I'm glad to find a man that can go ahead without me."⁸ Lincoln's statement acknowledges Grant's aptitude to exercise disciplined initiative. As commander of the Union Army in 1864, Grant commented that learning from failure led to his success. Without his earlier

⁶ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 283-391; McFeely, *Grant*, 111-21; Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 170-190; Bowery, *The Civil War in the Western Theater 1862*, 29-62; Terrence J. Winschel, *Triumph & Defeat: The Vicksburg Campaign* (New York: Savas Beatie LLC, 2004), 5-7.

⁷ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 283-391; McFeely, *Grant*, 111-121; Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 170-90; Bowery, *The Civil War in the Western Theater 1862*, 29-62; Winschel, *Triumph & Defeat*, 5-7; Arnold, *Grant Wins the War*, 27-98.

⁸ Jean Edward Smith, *Grant*, reprint ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 307.

experiences, he believed he would have failed if serving as senior Union commander in the beginning of the US Civil War.⁹

Historian Brooks Simpson argued that Grant did not succeed simply because of luck, and neither did he execute all of his duties flawlessly. Instead, Simpson described Grant as persistent, unafraid to take appropriate risk, practical during campaign planning, and a man who learned from his mistakes and successes.¹⁰ Similarly, Historian James Arnold saw how Grant “accepted war’s uncertainty by flexibly adjusting to new circumstances while maintaining a determined focus on the main chance.”¹¹ Lieutenant General John Schofield wrote that Grant’s simplicity made him a great commander. Schofield believed that Grant achieved this greatness “as the result of his own experience and independent thought.”¹² Many factors enabled Grant’s successful exercise of disciplined initiative. However, learning agility allowed him to innovate and adapt while confronting emergent properties within the US Civil War’s Western Theater.

In 2012, the US Army brought mission command and disciplined initiative to the forefront of its doctrine to correct inadequacies regarding the commander and staff’s role within recent command and control and battle command doctrine.¹³ The Army embraced the philosophy of mission command—defined in Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0 as the “exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative

⁹ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 283-391; McFeely, *Grant*, 111-21; Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 170-90; Bowery, *The Civil War in the Western Theater 1862*, 29-62; Winschel, *Triumph & Defeat*, 5-7; Arnold, *Grant Wins the War*, 27-98; Bowery, *The Civil War in the Western Theater 1862*, 62-71.

¹⁰ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 455-66.

¹¹ Arnold, *Grant Wins the War*, 4.

¹² John M. Schofield, *Forty-Six Years in the Army* (New York: Century Co., 1897), 524.

¹³ Clinton Ancker, “The Evolution of Mission Command in U.S. Army Doctrine, 1905 to the Present,” *Military Review*, March-April 2013: 42-52.

within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations”—as it began a period of transformation while remaining engaged in conflict across the globe.¹⁴ Released in 2014, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* “prioritizes the development of leaders capable of visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations in complex environments and against adaptive enemies.”¹⁵ To cope with the complex nature of the future operating environment and the rapid pace at which it may change, the US Army requires leaders who are prepared to exercise disciplined initiative. Even though the US Army only recently emphasized mission command, it has valued its principles since the creation of US Army Field Service Regulations (FSR) 1905, which read:

An order should not trespass on the province of the subordinate. It should contain everything, which is beyond the independent authority of the subordinate, but nothing more. When the transmission of orders involves a considerable period of time, during which the situation may change, detailed instructions are to be avoided. The same rule holds when orders may have to be carried out under circumstances which the originator of the order cannot completely forecast; in such cases letters of guidance is more appropriate. It should lay stress upon the object to be attained, and leave open the means to be employed.¹⁶

Much like Lincoln’s approval of Grant’s exercise of disciplined initiative, this extract from the 1905 FSR demonstrates that this mission command principle has a long history in US Army doctrine and education.

This brief summary of Grant’s early career demonstrates that he exhibited the traits described in both the FSR of 1905 and the modern US Army’s ADP 6-0, *Mission Command*, in his exercise of disciplined initiative more than 150 years ago. Similarly, other historical examples

¹⁴ Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1.

¹⁵ TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 3.

¹⁶ Field Service Regulations United States Army 1905, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 29-30; Ancker, “The Evolution of Mission Command in U.S. Army Doctrine, 1905 to the Present,” 42-52; ADP 6-0, 1.

provide insight into these newly emphasized concepts in today's operational army doctrine. Specifically, analysis of the historical examples of operational commanders that served in the Pacific Theater during World War II (WWII) provides a means to determine which type of learning experiences the US Army should prioritize to increase learning agility and enable the exercise of disciplined initiative by leaders in the future operating environment.

Purpose and Significance

Joint Publication 1 (JP 1) defines an operation as “a sequence of tactical actions with a common purpose or unifying theme.”¹⁷ That unifying theme or strategy is “a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater and multinational objectives.”¹⁸ Strategically, senior military leaders must balance tactical actions with US policy to maintain a continuous position of relative advantage.¹⁹ One cannot predict all of the challenges that limit the exercise of initiative in a complex environment; therefore, leaders must learn how to innovate and adapt to changing conditions through experiences such as military education, training, combat, and personal relationships. The US military during the interwar period before WWII faced a complex operational environment much like today's, while transforming its doctrine and organization through innovation despite the challenge of force reductions. When war came in 1941, senior military leaders were prepared to exercise disciplined initiative within an emerging combat environment. The experiences of senior military leaders during WWII provide lessons to assist the design of approaches for future education and leader development. Specifically, evidence drawn from the experiences of

¹⁷ Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), GL-10.

¹⁸ JP 1, I-5.

¹⁹ Everett Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Policy in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Taylor-Francis, 2005), 16.

operational commanders that served in the South Pacific Area (SOPA) and Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) reveals how learning agility enabled or hindered the exercise of disciplined initiative.

Definition of Terms

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines initiative as “the power or opportunity to do something before others do” or “the energy and desire that is needed to do something.”²⁰ Discipline is “control that is gained by requiring that rules or orders be obeyed and punishing bad behavior;” further, it is “the checking of one's true feelings and impulses when dealing with others.”²¹ Building on these definitions, one can learn from military theory why the US Army chose *disciplined* as a qualifier for the type of initiative that exists within mission command.

Frederick the Great described initiative as the liberty to react to the fluid nature of warfare and primarily limited this to the commitment of reserve forces.²² Ferdinand Foch used initiative in a similar manner, implying a freedom of action to respond to changing conditions.²³ Baron Henri de Jomini described initiative when discussing a single offensive operation and united it with the attack.²⁴ Carl von Clausewitz also linked initiative to the offense, but not one

²⁰ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary: New Edition*. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2005), 304.

²¹ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 223.

²² Frederick the Great, *Instructions for His Generals*, trans. Thomas Phillips (Mineola, NY: Courier Dover Publications, 2012), 92.

²³ Ferdinand Foch, *The Principle of War*, trans. by Hilaire Belloc (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 100.

²⁴ Henri de Jomini, *Art of War*, trans. G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill (West Point, NY: 1862), 72.

single operation.²⁵ Friedrich von Bernhardi described initiative as “acting in compliance with...one’s own intentions, instead of submitting to those of the enemy.”²⁶

Recent military theorists such as John Boyd used the term action to express initiative, but did not limit it to offensive action.²⁷ Huba Wass de Czege described how initiative restricts freedom of action of an adversary while allowing independent actions by subordinates to overcome friction on the battlefield.²⁸ Robert Leonhard provided another interpretation by arguing in *Principles of War for the Information Age* that initiative is not an action or something one does, so much as it is a condition of sustained freedom of action.²⁹

Like initiative, the term discipline exists throughout military theory. For example, in *My Reveries upon the Art of War*, Maurice de Saxe wrote that “after the organization of troops, military discipline is the first matter that presents itself.”³⁰ De Saxe revealed how discipline corrects men’s opinions, prejudices, and passions. He understood that in the military it is much easier to take men as they are, than to mold them into what they should be.³¹ Whether good or evil, individual human nature does not fit into the ideal military culture. Helmuth von Moltke wrote that “the discipline of the units gives assurance that the will of the superior will everywhere

²⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 84, 229, 358, 364.

²⁶ Friedrich von Bernhardi, *On War of Today* (London: H Rees, 1912), 343.

²⁷ Frans P. B. Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 185.

²⁸ Huba Wass de Czege, “Toward a New American Approach to Warfare,” *The Art of War Quarterly* 2 (September 1983): 53-4. For a definition of friction, see Clausewitz, *On War*, 119.

²⁹ Robert Leonhard, *Principles of War for the Information Age* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1998), 90-93.

³⁰ Maurice de Saxe, *My Reveries upon the Art of War*, ed. by Thomas Phillips (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007), 77.

³¹ Maurice de Saxe, *My Reveries upon the Art of War*, 77-80.

attain execution....discipline is the foundation pillar of the army; its strict maintenance benefits everything.”³² The military uses discipline to create a commitment to the group, a sense of pride, and a willingness to overcome fear in each of its members. Thus, US Army doctrine synthesized the theory behind both discipline and initiative, using the term *disciplined* to describe initiative undertaken by military personnel who are capable of overcoming their human nature.

Comparable to Moltke’s theory of warfare, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* defines disciplined initiative as “action in the absence of orders, when existing orders no longer fit the situation, or when unforeseen opportunities or threats arise.”³³ Helmuth von Moltke wrote,

Victory or defeat in battle changes the situation to such a degree that no human acumen is able to see beyond the first battle. Therefore, no plan of operation extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the main hostile force.... The advantage of the situation will never be fully utilized if subordinate commanders wait for orders, it will be generally more advisable to proceed actively and keep the initiative than to wait to the law of the opponent.³⁴

Disciplined initiative allows commanders to trust that subordinates will take action and develop the situation. Contributing the most to the exercise of disciplined initiative, commander’s intent provides subordinates with the mission’s purpose, key tasks, and desired end state. To remain disciplined, commanders and subordinates are obligated to follow lawful orders. Deviation from orders should only occur when they are unlawful, needlessly risk lives, or no longer fit the situation. *Disciplined* implies that subordinates will inform their superiors quickly upon departure from orders.³⁵ In the case of Grant during the US Civil War’s Vicksburg Campaign, Halleck’s

³² Daniel Hughes, ed. *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (New York: Presidio Press, 1993), 177-78.

³³ ADP 6-0, 4.

³⁴ Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War*, 92-93.

³⁵ ADP 6-0, 4.

orders and President Lincoln's intent served as boundaries in which he exercised disciplined initiative while contending with the dynamic nature of warfare.

In line with the concept of disciplined initiative, *The US Army Learning Concept for 2015* stressed the importance of learning agility:

Soldiers and leaders recognize when standard procedures are not an effective solution to a situation and use innovation to develop new procedures and devices that are necessary to handle the situation. Mental agility and a global mindset allow them to anticipate changes in the operational environment, adapt to the changes, and anticipate the second and third order effects of their actions and decisions.³⁶

As defined by two human resource management experts, learning agility represents, “the willingness and ability to learn from experience, and subsequently apply that learning to perform successfully under new or first-time conditions.”³⁷ Understanding the terms initiative, discipline, and learning agility—in accordance with military theory, doctrine, and contemporary learning theory—allows assessment of experiences that raise learning agility, and enable the exercise of disciplined initiative.³⁸

Contemporary Learning Theory

Constructivism and experiential learning theory provide means to evaluate how learning agility grows and enables disciplined initiative. Constructivism describes how humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between experiences and ideas. It theorizes that categories of knowledge and reality are the products of social and symbolic relationships and interactions, all within the time and space boundaries of a cultural context. These categories are

³⁶ TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, *The US Army Learning Concept for 2015* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 43.

³⁷ M. M. Lombardo and R. W. Eichinger, “High Potentials as High Learners,” *Human Resource Management*, 39, 2000: 321–30.

³⁸ TRADOC Pamphlet 525-8-2, 43.

contingent on convention, language, human perception, and social experience. Reality is that moment of intersection of those participating, and not a concrete, discrete time and place. Constructivism is a process of internalizing knowledge through assimilation and accommodation.³⁹

Assimilation occurs during incorporation of a new experience into an already existing framework. This may occur when an experience aligns with an individual's internal representation of the world, or when an experience opposes an existing framework. In the case of contradiction, individuals will adapt their perceptions of the experience to fit their internal representations. Accommodation is the process of reframing one's mental representation of the external world to fit new experiences. For instance, individuals learn from the experience of failure by accommodating new experiences and reframing internal models. This can also apply to observation of another individual's failure.⁴⁰ The context in which learning occurs plays a central role in constructivism and learning through experience. To fully engage and challenge the learner, the task and learning conditions should reflect the complexity of the environment in which the learner will operate at the end of learning.

Along with constructivism, experiential learning theory defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience."⁴¹ In the 1970s, David A. Kolb helped to develop experiential learning theory by drawing on the work of other prevalent adult education

³⁹ D. Satterly, "Piaget and Education," *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 622-23.

⁴⁰ Satterly, "Piaget and Education," 622-23.

⁴¹ D. A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 41.

theorists such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget.⁴² A process of learning through reflection on doing, Kolb's four-stage cyclical theory of learning takes a holistic view by combining experiences with human perception, cognition, and behavior. Kolb's experiential learning model (ELM) illustrates how this process occurs in four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.⁴³

One can best understand Kolb's ELM by applying it to a simple example, such as an individual's purchase of a new hunting rifle and effort to develop individual rifle marksmanship skills. For this individual, the concrete experience stage revolves around personal experience firing the rifle. Additional concrete experiences may include observing another individual firing a rifle, education received during a hunter safety course, or reading about methods that improve marksmanship. Concrete experiences serve as the basis for observation and reflection by the learner.⁴⁴

After each concrete experience firing the rifle in an attempt to hit a target, the learner considers what helped and what did not. A period of reflective observation between occurrences allows the learner to think about ways to improve during the next experience at the rifle range. During abstract conceptualization, the learner will research and practice different methods to improve. At this point, a cyclical pattern of previous experience, thought, reflection, and active experimentation informs each new attempt. While this example of rifle marksmanship implies

⁴² Sharan B. Merriam, *New Update on Adult Learning Theory* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 26.

⁴³ Kolb, *Experiential Learning*, 39-43.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

instruction during the process, it is important to note that experiential learning often takes place without supervision.⁴⁵

Kolb theorized that in order to gain genuine knowledge from an experience, the learner must have four abilities. The learner must actively engage in the experience, reflect on the experience, analyze and conceptualize the experience, and employ decision-making and problem solving skills in order to use the new ideas gained from the experience.⁴⁶ During a military career, an officer's experiences fall into four primary categories: combat, education, training, and personal relationships. Kolb's experiential learning model (ELM) provides a system to assess how each category enables the exercise of disciplined initiative.

Another adult education theorist, Donald Schön uses reflection-in-action to describe a practitioner's ability to "think on his or her feet" within any given moment. Schön recognized that when faced with a professional issue, practitioners usually connect with their feelings, emotions and prior experiences to attend to the situation directly. Along with reflection-in-action, he theorized that reflection-on-action occurs after the experience when a practitioner analyzes the results of action.⁴⁷ In other words, during experiential learning, reflection increases learning agility. Learning experiences that have the most significant impact on learning agility are those that are "emotional, require risk-taking and have real-life consequences."⁴⁸ In a 2010 study, Korn/Ferry Leadership and Talent Consulting identified learning agility as the top ranking predictor of leadership success. The group estimated that only fifteen percent of the civilian

⁴⁵ Kolb, *Experiential Learning*, 39-43.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design For Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), 26.

⁴⁸ K. P. De Meuse, G. Dai, and G. S. Hallenbeck, "Learning Agility: A Construct Whose Time Has Come," *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 62(2), 2010: 121.

workforce is highly learning agile.⁴⁹ Like disciplined initiative, learning agility applies to leaders with the confidence to make decisions on the spot, even in the absence of complete, conclusive data. Historical study reveals that Grant displayed this characteristic routinely. For example, at one point during the US Civil War one of Grant's subordinates asked if he was confident in a decision regarding logistics. Grant replied, "No I am not, but in war anything is better than indecision. We must decide. If I am wrong, we shall soon find it out, and can do the other thing. But not to decide wastes both time and money, and may ruin everything."⁵⁰ Korn/Ferry Leadership and Talent Consulting determined that learning agile leaders must possess qualities such as openness, authentic listening, and adaptability. Learning agile leaders must also possess the ability to embrace obscure situations and other people's ideas with an open mind.⁵¹

Learning agility allows an individual to learn something in one situation and apply it to a completely different problem within a completely different set of conditions. To develop learning agility, leaders must seek out learning experiences and embrace complex problems that arise with new experiences. Individuals who possess high learning agility learn the correct lessons from experience and understand how to apply those lessons to new situations. This implies that they do not make the same mistakes repeatedly. They continuously seek out new challenges, and use feedback from others to grow and develop, self-reflect, evaluate their experiences, and draw practical conclusions.⁵² To enable the exercise of disciplined initiative the US Army needs to build leaders that possess a high level of learning agility.

⁴⁹ De Meuse, Dai, and Hallenbeck, "Learning agility: A Construct Whose Time has Come," 121-30.

⁵⁰ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 249.

⁵¹ De Meuse, Dai, and Hallenbeck, "Learning agility: A Construct Whose Time has Come," 121-30.

⁵² Ibid.

Methodology

In *Young Men and Fire*, Norman Maclean wrote, “you can’t explain the cause of a big fire of long ago if you can’t reconstruct the winds that caused it.”⁵³ John Gaddis described the historian’s obligation to get inside the mind of another person or age and then find the way out again. Historical study therefore involves the manipulation of time, space, and scale.⁵⁴ One cannot reconstruct the learning experiences that enabled all past military leaders to develop learning agility and exercise disciplined initiative. One can, however, first review the evolution of discipline, initiative, and learning agility within theory and doctrine before bounding the problem by focusing on the lives of two past military commanders that exercised disciplined initiative. Chronological study of experiences that take place during education, training, combat, and through personal relationships reveals those events that most contributed to building learning agility and the exercise of disciplined initiative.

Choice of Case Studies

For the purpose of this study, the Pacific Theater during WWII provided the proper winds for the exercise of disciplined initiative. In his book *Engineers of Victory*, Paul Kennedy described those conditions in the context of Japanese and Allied actions during the war. Kennedy wrote, “the two combatants did not spar in a fixed space, like a boxing ring, but across a vast geographic arena in which the exploitation of distance, time, and opportunity by each combatant’s leaders and planners was just as important as the morale of their fighting forces and the quality of the weapons.”⁵⁵ Much like the case of Grant during the US Civil War, technology

⁵³ Norman Maclean, *Young Men and Fire* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 128.

⁵⁴ John L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 129.

⁵⁵ Paul Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory* (New York: Random House, 2013), 284.

and geography affected communication and required vast operational reach by military organizations. On the eve of WWII, a common lack of combat experience with new doctrine existed throughout the US military. Maintaining balance between the air, land, and sea domains while achieving interdependence between all US military branches and members of the Allied coalition challenged those serving in the Pacific.

Vice Admiral Frank “Jack” Fletcher and Lieutenant General Walter Krueger served in the Pacific Theater during WWII. One can distinguish two periods of experience in each officer’s professional development—the interwar years before WWII, and the period of direct American involvement in the war. Within each period, education, combat, training, and personal relationships provided opportunities for each officer to build learning agility. The first period comprises each commander’s childhood, education, and leadership development before WWII. It begins at the turn of the twentieth century and continues through the end of 1941. The second period begins in 1942 with the crucible of early combat and focuses on how each officer contended with the complex nature of war by learning how to operate in accordance with doctrine created during the interwar period. This period features adaptation, or failure to adapt because of poor learning agility. It concludes when Japan surrendered: in August, 1945.

Careful study of each officer’s military career reveals which individual experiences best enabled the exercise of disciplined initiative during joint and combined operations. Fletcher, a recipient of the Medal of Honor for actions at Vera Cruz, Mexico in 1915, received criticism for being too cautious and lacking initiative during the early phases of WWII. This perception largely contributed to his year-long departure from the Pacific Theater beginning in October, 1942. However, history shows that beginning in December 1941, Fletcher led forces that contributed

decisively to turning the initiative in favor of the United States over Japan by the end of 1942.⁵⁶ Krueger served as the Sixth Army commander under General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the SWPA during WWII. Arriving in the Pacific in early 1943, he exercised disciplined initiative while operating forward of MacArthur's direct span of control during the island hopping campaigns along the way to Japan. In recognition of his success, MacArthur chose Krueger to lead the invasion of Japan (an operation narrowly averted by Japan's capitulation in August, 1945). After the war, MacArthur identified Krueger as particularly effective, describing him as "swift and sure in the attack, tenacious and determined in defense, modest and restrained in victory. I do not know what he would have been in defeat, because he was never defeated."⁵⁷

Experience and Learning Agility Development

Learning agility contributed to Vice Admiral Frank "Jack" Fletcher and Lieutenant General Walter Krueger's exercise of disciplined initiative in the Pacific Theater during WWII. Comparative analysis of each officer's experiences before the war reveals the degree to which each officer developed learning agility through education, combat, training, and personal relationships. Educational experience includes each officer's childhood and professional military education prior to WWII. The progress of the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Army War College (AWC) in Washington, DC, and the Naval War College (NWC) at Newport, Rhode Island during the interwar period played an important role in each commander's development of learning agility before the war.

⁵⁶ John Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006), xv.

⁵⁷ Kevin Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger: Unsung Hero of the Pacific* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007), 6.

In recognition of Clausewitz's view that theory must be "kept close to its proper soil" of combat experience, military commanders must continuously interpret their practice to explain the dynamic nature of warfare.⁵⁸ Historian Brian M. Linn also emphasized the significance of combat: "Creating a new army way of war depends to a great extent on what they choose to hear in the echo of battle."⁵⁹ During the early twentieth century's interwar period, military officers determined future war would require an ability to project, conduct, and sustain large-scale joint operations that connect tactical actions to US political and economic strategy. During this period, the military focused on new technology and doctrine in support of maneuver warfare by air, land, and sea. Each officer's pre-WWII combat experiences may provide examples of taking action that resulted in a major blunder.⁶⁰ These experiences, along with the other many learning opportunities during interwar training provide a foundation of experience that enables military leaders to adapt to a dynamic environment.

As Clausewitz described, the "understanding of war's nature, or whether we believe it has one, influences how we approach the conduct of war, how we develop military strategy, doctrine and concepts, and train and equip combat forces."⁶¹ To prepare for future wars, commanders must train their personnel for combat operations within the guidelines of organizational doctrine. The doctrine that existed upon the eve of WWII emerged from a process of reflecting on previous combat experience, preparing updated doctrine, and then testing that new doctrine and incorporating it into US Army educational institutions and training events.

⁵⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 61.

⁵⁹ Brian M. Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 243.

⁶⁰ Michael R. Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy: American Operational Art to 1945* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 269.

⁶¹ Antulio J. Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). 58.

Confidence in the proficiency of military forces—based in large part on their understanding of doctrine—directly influences commanders’ actions in combat. Conversely, the success or failure of commanders in combat depends in large part on their ability to augment pre-war training experiences with learning that takes place during combat. General Lesley J. McNair made this evident with his reaction to the widely publicized setbacks during the Battle of Kasserine Pass in early 1943, when he noted in a nationally broadcast speech that only battle hardening could drive peacetime training home.⁶²

Personal relationships play an important role in the development of military officers as mentorship builds learning agility. Within the principles of mission command, the existence of mutual trust is crucial to the exercise of disciplined initiative. Evaluating the relationships that commanders developed throughout their careers allows assessment of the way in which relationships fostered the growth of learning agility and enabled the exercise of disciplined initiative during WWII.

Learning Agility Dimensions

Learning agility is an extension of experiential learning theory in that it reflects the ability to apply learning gained through experience to individual and organizational performance. Specific experiences that increase an individual or organization’s learning agility fall within one of five dimensions: mental agility, people agility, change agility, results agility, and self-awareness. A brief description of each of these dimensions, as defined by learning agility theorists from the field of psychology, clarifies their relationship to experiential learning theory.⁶³

⁶² Mark T. Calhoun, *General Lesley J. McNair: Unsung Architect of the U.S. Army* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2015), 269.

⁶³ De Meuse, Dai, and Hallenbeck, “Learning Agility: A Construct Whose Time has Come,” 125.

By “thinking critically to penetrate complex problems and expanding possibilities by making fresh connections” an individual displays mental agility.⁶⁴ Grant displayed this dimension by innovating to overcome challenges of terrain, weather, and enemy action. One can see these abilities mature in Grant as he demonstrates increasingly skillful leadership during the campaigns in the Western Theater during the American Civil War.⁶⁵

Agile learners tend to possess a talent for “understanding and relating to other people, as well as tough situations to harness and multiply collective performance.”⁶⁶ Grant used people agility to assess the enemy he faced during the Civil War by reflecting upon his interactions with officers during the Mexican-American War. This dimension also existed as he fostered personal relationships and built a cohesive team during the Vicksburg Campaign.⁶⁷

During his campaign to isolate Vicksburg in 1862 and 1863, Grant experimented with many different techniques to maneuver his forces south of the town’s artillery batteries along the Mississippi River. His actions reveal change agility, as he was unafraid to experiment, remained curious, and dealt effectively with the discomfort of change.⁶⁸ One also sees Grant’s change agility in his use of restraint instead of force to reduce violent action by the South’s civilian populace against Union forces.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 170-215.

⁶⁶ De Meuse, Dai, and Hallenbeck, “Learning Agility: A Construct Whose Time has Come,” 125.

⁶⁷ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 78-215; Steven R. Woodworth, *Grant’s Lieutenants: From Cairo to Vicksburg* (Lawrence, KS: University Press Kansas, 2001), 1.

⁶⁸ De Meuse, Dai, and Hallenbeck, “Learning Agility: A Construct Whose Time has Come,” 125.

⁶⁹ Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 170-215.

At Vicksburg, Major General McClernand continuously attempted to discredit Grant with superiors in Washington, DC. However, Grant remained self-confident and maintained his focus on achieving the result of getting his force across the Mississippi River safely.⁷⁰ Grant's eventual isolation of Vicksburg shows that he was capable of "delivering results in first-time situations by inspiring teams, and exhibiting a presence that builds confidence in themselves and others."⁷¹

Perhaps most important of all, Grant remained continually self-aware. He continually evaluated his chances of success and failure. Further, he sought to balance his actions as a commander with his "capabilities and their impact on others."⁷² This dimension helped him to avoid making the same mistakes repeatedly.

Much like Grant's life leading up until the Vicksburg Campaign, both Fletcher and Krueger display the five dimensions of learning agility during their military careers. Further examination of each will reveal concrete experiences essential to the successful exercise of disciplined initiative.⁷³ Identifying these experiences will provide focus for the design of approaches to future military education, training, and leader development.

Thesis

An examination of operational commanders and their actions in the Pacific Theater during WWII reveals how learning agility correlates to the exercise of disciplined initiative. This analysis reveals how Kolb's experiential learning model (ELM), and contemporary learning theory provide means through which the US Army can foster professional relationships and prioritize experiences within education and training to increase learning agility. Increased mental

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ De Meuse, Dai, and Hallenbeck, "Learning Agility: A Construct Whose Time has Come," 125.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

agility, people agility, change agility, results agility, and self-awareness will improve US Army leaders' exercise of disciplined initiative in complex operating environments.

Preparation for World War II

Walter Krueger's Pre-Interwar Experience (Pre-1920)

Born in Flatow, West Prussia in 1881, Walter Krueger's military roots originate with his father Julius, who served as a Prussian military officer during the Franco-Prussian War. After Julius died, Krueger's family immigrated to the United States where his mother remarried Emil Schmidt, a German-born Lutheran minister. Krueger received his formal education at the Upper Seminary School in Madison, Indiana. He also spent long hours studying mathematics, music, and languages under his mother and stepfather's supervision. In addition to English and German, Krueger became fluent in French and Spanish. A demanding stepfather, Schmidt instilled the importance of discipline, hard work, and precision within Krueger. Like his stepfather, he could sometimes be abrasive, and often criticized subordinate commanders during his military career. In childhood, Krueger built a foundation for the development of learning agility through his passion for the pursuit of knowledge.⁷⁴

As a teenager, Krueger wanted to attend the US Naval Academy (USNA), but his mother disapproved. Instead, he left Indiana to attend the Cincinnati Technical School in Ohio where he trained to become a blacksmith.⁷⁵ In June 1898, Krueger and many of his classmates left school to enlist into the 2nd US Volunteer Infantry during the Spanish-American War. He advanced quickly to the rank of sergeant in Cuba, but left the service to train as a civil engineer after his

⁷⁴ George B. Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice: General Walter Krueger and the Development of Joint Operations, 1921-1945" (Master's thesis, US Naval War College, 1994), 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 9-11.

⁷⁵ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 11.

tour with the Volunteers. However, Krueger found that he missed military culture and reenlisted into the 12th Infantry regiment. In the summer of 1899, he traveled to the Philippines to fight with Major General Arthur MacArthur Jr. and the 2nd Division.⁷⁶

Krueger participated in the twenty-five mile offensive from Angeles City to Tarlac City, and pursued Emilio Aguinaldo's insurrectos through Luzon's central plains to Dagupan City. As historian Brian Linn described of the US Army's experience in the Philippines, Krueger "relearned the Heroic martial tradition of initiative, morale, and adaptation of one's tactics to the environment and the enemy."⁷⁷ In the fall of 1899, Krueger witnessed firsthand the exercise of ill-disciplined initiative by a superior. At the time, his regiment served as part the brigade ordered to suppress the main enemy force in front of the 2nd Division. Instead of following orders, the brigade commander conducted a frontal assault and Krueger's regiment ended up fighting as a disorganized mob, advancing miles beyond the division. While his superior's initiative resulted in victory, it could have resulted in disaster if the enemy forces had maintained their defensive positions longer.⁷⁸ Krueger advanced quickly from private to sergeant, just as he had in Cuba. In recognition of his broad childhood education and demonstrated leadership potential, his superiors offered him the opportunity to take a commissioning exam.

In July 1901, Krueger secured a commission as a second lieutenant, yet he never forgot his enlisted experience. Displaying people agility, he later remarked that he could empathize with his troops because he had been one himself. Historian Brian Linn argued that the experience of

⁷⁶ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 11-15.

⁷⁷ Linn, *The Echo of Battle*, 82.

⁷⁸ Brian M. Linn, *The Philippine War: 1899-1902* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 152-53.

the Spanish-American War reinforced the importance of individual character as US Army officers “frequently exhibited physical toughness, leadership, and indifference to danger, even at the sacrifice of military efficiency.”⁷⁹ US Army Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell highlighted the criticality of adaptability, intelligence, leadership, and character for officers leading combat troops during the war. Growing self-reliance, Krueger displayed both mental and change agility by modifying tactics from conventional to unconventional warfare.⁸⁰

As a young lieutenant, Krueger saw first-hand the effect of poor logistics as supplies routinely failed to make it to the front lines.⁸¹ Understanding the human aspect of warfare, Krueger observed how the combination of an adapting enemy, hunger, and tropical climate caused a negative psychological effect to his organization. He developed a calm approach with enlisted men, and a demanding treatment of officers. Early on, many noticed Krueger’s perceptiveness as he rapidly assessed individuals and organizations. This trait gave him a unique ability to maintain an accurate assessment of the capabilities and limitations of his forces—an important quality for judging risk and enabling the exercise of disciplined initiative.⁸² Notable during Krueger’s first five years in the Army, he developed a life-long pattern of self-study and continuously pursued opportunities to gain further education. As an officer who did not graduate from West Point, this pattern proved essential to his continued advancement in the military.⁸³

⁷⁹ Linn, *The Echo of Battle*, 83.

⁸⁰ Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 11-15.

⁸¹ Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 11-15; Linn, *The Philippine War*, 151.

⁸² Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 11-15.

⁸³ Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 15-17.

In 1904, Krueger began his formal military education at Fort Leavenworth's Infantry and Cavalry School. Graduating with honors, he remained in Kansas an additional year to attend the Staff College. Historian Peter Schifferle described how the "combination of command and staff skills, like the operational principles and military problem-solving skills taught at Leavenworth, was the source of the absolutely critical professional self-confidence in these soon-to-be senior officers."⁸⁴ Krueger's language skills enabled his close study of theory and doctrine created outside the United States. Using his mental agility, he translated Friederich Immanuel's, *The Regimental War Game* and adapted from it a method for conducting map maneuvers.⁸⁵

Upon graduation, Krueger commanded a second infantry company and then returned to the Philippines in 1908 to conduct the first topographical survey of Luzon's central plains. After a subsequent intelligence assignment in Manila, Krueger returned to Leavenworth where he taught Spanish, German, and wrote an article that analyzed why new recruits abandon their units. In the article, Krueger theorized that the military must leverage indoctrination to overcome the challenge of human nature.⁸⁶ In accordance with the Dick Act of 1903, Krueger spent his summer months umpiring the maneuvers of National Guard units at training areas throughout the United States. Growing change agility, this experience greatly influenced the acceptance of prudent risk during employment of unprepared military units at the beginning of war. After commanding a third infantry company, Krueger worked as advisor to the Pennsylvania National Guard in 1914.

⁸⁴ Peter J. Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2010), 191.

⁸⁵ Immanuel, *The Regimental War Game* trans. Walter Krueger (Kansas City: Hudson Press, 1907), Preface.

⁸⁶ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 21-24.

He developed a reputation as tough, yet helpful while training the unit for federal service during conflict between the United States and Mexico.⁸⁷

In a March 1917 issue of *Infantry Journal*, entitled “Preparedness,” Krueger argued that quickly mobilized citizen soldiers lacked competency. He recommended conscription and a two-tiered reserve system to prepare the nation for a major European-style war.⁸⁸ He went on to serve in the Bureau of Military Affairs where he championed this view; however, like Emory Upton in the late nineteenth century, Krueger’s argument had little effect in the face of traditional American views regarding universal service. Next, Krueger served a brief tour as the 84th Division operations officer (G3) preparing the unit for involvement in World War I (WWI). While G3, the Army Corps of Engineers requested that he translate and publish Julius K. L. Mertens’ *Tactics and Technique of River Crossings* in anticipation of America’s involvement in the war.⁸⁹ This provided Krueger an opportunity to diversify individual knowledge and foster mental agility by closely studying the challenges inherent during gap crossings.

In February 1918, Krueger travelled to Langres, France to attend the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) General Staff School—a shorter, three-month version of the recently-closed school at Fort Leavenworth. Critical during mobilization and expansion of the AEF officer corps, Langres taught the skills required by staff officers and used practical application of problem solving as the basis of instruction.⁹⁰ After graduation, Krueger briefly served as G3 of New England’s 26th Infantry Division where he first experienced the

⁸⁷ Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 24-26.

⁸⁸ Walter Krueger, “Preparedness,” *Infantry Journal* 13, 6 (March 1917): 553.

⁸⁹ Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 24-27.

⁹⁰ Peter J. Schifferle, *America's School for War*, 11-14.

maneuvering of multiple divisional units in combat. Not required to serve near the front lines, Krueger demonstrated results agility by regularly travelling forward to inspect and motivate the troops. As a G3, Krueger began to “fully appreciate and account for the requirements of modern warfare—combined arms reliance on massive firepower in an effort to conduct breakthrough of the defensive front aimed at restoring some form of mobility to combat.”⁹¹ In the fall of 1918, he requested assignment as Chief of Staff to the newly-formed AEF Tank Corps, which some saw as the key to mobility on the WWI battlefield. Selected for the position, Krueger saw it as an opportunity for advancement; but the end of WWI cut his service with the AEF Tank Corps short.⁹²

During his first twenty years in the military, Krueger established himself as ambitious, energetic, and determined. Leading by personal example, he revealed results agility by holding high expectations of subordinates. As student, instructor, and writer at Fort Leavenworth Krueger earned an education and built a reputation as a tactical expert. He demonstrated change agility as a company and field grade officer by writing his “Preparedness” article, and in his assignment to an early armored force—also revealing the courage to engage in professional discourse about future warfare and his comfort with innovation. By 1920, Krueger reverted to his permanent Army rank of captain, but soon earned promotion to major and selection for attendance at the US Army War College.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid., 13.

⁹² Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 26-30.

⁹³ Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 6-13; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 29-30.

Frank “Jack” Fletcher’s Pre-Interwar Experience (Pre-1920)

Born to a wealthy family in Marshalltown, Iowa on April 29, 1885, Frank Jack Fletcher’s parents named him after an uncle, Frank Friday Fletcher, who served with distinction in the US Navy. They called him by his middle name to avoid confusion with his uncle. Jack learned from his family the importance of personal relationships and political connections. Jack’s father Thomas served during the US Civil War, and with Jack’s mother Alice, strongly supported duty to community and nation. His formal education included math, science, English, Greek, and Roman history. Jack’s upbringing provided him with many career opportunities by his late teens. However, stories of his grandfather’s early exploits travelling the United States and his Uncle Frank Friday’s journeys in the US Navy gave him an adventurist spirit. With the assistance of his family’s political influence, Jack gained appointment to the USNA in 1902.⁹⁴

In the early 20th Century the USNA remained a trade school, where Fletcher studied ballistics, explosives, navigation, propulsion, sailing, and other nautical instruction. While the education of midshipman at the time overlooked analysis and synthesis, it taught teamwork and indoctrination. Demonstrating people agility, Fletcher worked well with others and displayed diplomatic skill. He developed close relationships with classmates he later served with in the Pacific during WWII.⁹⁵ Never known to say a derogatory thing about anyone, Fletcher gained a reputation for trustworthiness. He graduated in the upper half of his class in February 1906.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Scott T. Farr, “The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower” (Master’s thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2003), 24-30; Steven D. Regan, *In Bitter Tempest: The Biography of Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1994), 5-10.

⁹⁵ Frank Jack Fletcher’s US Naval Academy classmates included key WWII figures such as Robert L. Ghormley, Leigh Noyes, Milo Draemel, Isaac Kidd, John McCain, Aubrey W. “Jake” Fitch, and Bill Calhoun. See Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 14.

⁹⁶ Farr, “The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower,” 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 13-19.

Assigned to the Atlantic after graduation, Fletcher served aboard the largest and fastest battleship in the US Navy at the time, the USS Rhode Island, before moving to another new but smaller battleship, the USS Ohio. After taking the final examination for commissioning in 1907, Fletcher served on the naval survey ship USS Eagle. Off the coast of Haiti in the later months of 1907, he led a small security force ashore to protect the US consulate at Gonaives during a civil uprising. Fletcher's team did not exchange gunfire with hostile forces during the mission; however, this served as his first combat experience and an opportunity to develop mental and results agility.⁹⁷

In April 1908, Fletcher commissioned and received orders to the Asiatic Fleet. Shortly after arrival in Cavite, Philippines in late 1909, he reported for service on the destroyer USS Chauncey. Between the Chauncey and his first command of the USS Dale in 1910, Fletcher pursued every available opportunity to learn about naval gunfire with his crew. His leadership proved pivotal when the USS Dale won a gunnery competition among the similar ships in his flotilla. As a new lieutenant in 1911, Fletcher reflected that his success commanding the USS Dale would lead to subsequent commands in the Asiatic Fleet. However, he believed that continued service in the Pacific would slow further advancement and reached out to his mentor, then-Rear Admiral Frank Friday, to obtain reassignment to the Atlantic. Assigned to his uncle's First Atlantic Division in 1912, Fletcher served as a member of the headquarters staff section aboard the USS Florida. Vicariously, Fletcher grew change agility by reflecting on his uncle's progressive practices and comfort with naval innovation as this led to Frank Friday's placement in one of the US Navy's senior leadership positions.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 19-23.

⁹⁸ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 23-27.

Fletcher's naval flotilla travelled to the Gulf of Mexico in the spring of 1914. In April of that year US intelligence discovered a German ship heading to Mexico carrying arms and munitions to support the Mexican conflict. In response, the flotilla seized the key port of Vera Cruz, where Fletcher commanded the *Esperanza*, a civilian steamship chartered by the Navy to evacuate refugees. After mooring at the port, Fletcher and a fourteen-man crew came under heavy sniper fire from ashore. To prevent the situation from escalating, Fletcher ordered his men to station themselves as sentries on the deck, but not to return fire. Leading by example, he walked the decks until the crew completed loading of 350 refugees without injury. A few days later, Fletcher went ashore and assumed responsibility for a locomotive designated to transport refugees from the interior of Mexico—dangerous duty as those assigned travelled along rail lines heavily mined and defended by unfriendly Mexican troops. Displaying mental and people agility while adapting to a new and complex situation, Fletcher used his charismatic personality to win over the Mexican troops he met along the route. Altogether, he safely brought back over 2,000 refugees to Vera Cruz. Fletcher later remarked, “maintaining personal composure tended to calm subordinates; a firm but courteous demeanor was not only tactful, it was essential.”⁹⁹

For his contributions at Vera Cruz, Fletcher received the Congressional Medal of Honor.¹⁰⁰ The citation reads,

He was in charge of the *Esperanza* and succeeded in getting on board over 350 refugees, many of them after the conflict commenced. This ship was under fire, being struck more than 30 times, but he succeeded in getting all the refugees placed in safety. Later he was placed in charge of the train conveying refugees under a flag of truce. This was hazardous duty, as it was believed the track was mined, and a small error in dealing with the Mexican guard of soldiers might readily have caused conflict, such a conflict at one time being narrowly averted. It was greatly due to his efforts in establishing relations

⁹⁹ Farr, “The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower,” 26; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 33.

¹⁰⁰ The US government awarded fifty-five Medals of Honor for actions in Mexico. See Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 27-32.

with Mexican soldiers that so many refugees succeeded in reaching Vera Cruz from the interior.¹⁰¹

After Vera Cruz, Fletcher served as an aide to his uncle, who took command of the Atlantic Fleet. After a failed attempt to attend the NWC, Fletcher served in the USNA executive department, and then as gunnery officer aboard the battleship, USS Kearsarge. A newly promoted Lieutenant Commander when the United States entered WWI in 1917, Fletcher assumed risk by pursuing command of one of the Navy's newly converted sailing yachts—the USS Margaret—while most of his peers chose the safer career path aboard large ships headed to Europe. Lightly armed, the yacht held a reputation for being difficult to control and unsuitable for anti-submarine patrols. Displaying change and results agility, Fletcher did his best to turn his yacht and crewmembers into a war-ready instrument. He ended up writing a series of letters to the Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) regarding the Margaret's inadequacies. At first, the SECNAV failed to respond and Fletcher worried that this experience placed his advancement in jeopardy; however, he gained a new opportunity to command after reassignment to commander of naval forces in European waters in 1918.¹⁰²

Fletcher arrived at his new command aboard the USS Benham in April 1918, relieving the outgoing captain, Commander William F. Halsey.¹⁰³ Fletcher spent the summer of 1918 chasing German submarines and protecting allied supply convoys in the Atlantic. Fletcher displayed results agility during WWI as the competence and valor of his ship led to his receipt of the Navy Cross.¹⁰⁴ After service in the Atlantic, he returned to the United States in the late

¹⁰¹ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 32-33.

¹⁰² Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 34-38.

¹⁰³ E. B. Potter, *Bull Halsey* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 110-11.

¹⁰⁴ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to

summer of 1918 to oversee the fitting of three new ships at Union Iron Works in San Francisco, California. This experience gave Fletcher insight into the building process for the primary tool of his trade. He displayed people agility by using his warm personality to overcome obstacles dealing with civilian workers at the shipyard. In 1919, Fletcher pursued assignment to Washington DC to allow interaction with the men that ran the Navy.¹⁰⁵

By 1920, Frank Jack Fletcher established himself as a rising star in the US Navy. Unknown to say a negative word about others, he developed a reputation with peers and subordinates as a trustworthy and likeable officer that led by personal example. Fletcher's experiences during the early portion of his military career demonstrated people and results agility as his charismatic personality fostered teams and appealed to the human nature of others. He grew change and mental agility by embracing innovation and adapting tactics while in charge of a passenger train at Vera Cruz. Risking career advancement with combat duty aboard an unproven naval vessel during WWI, Fletcher displayed change agility. Serving on the Margaret afforded Fletcher caution during the pursuit of risky assignments, and likely influenced his self-awareness over the remainder of his career.

Walter Krueger's Interwar Experience (1920-1941)

Returning to the United States in June 1919, Walter Krueger served at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia before briefly commanding the 55th Infantry Regiment at Camp Funston, Kansas. Building on earlier experiences at Fort Leavenworth, he stood out at the AWC in 1920, leading to retention as a member of the faculty after graduation. As an instructor, Krueger taught the art of command and the history of the European military system. He studied

Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 34-38.

¹⁰⁵ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 38.

closely the ideas of military thinkers such as Clausewitz, Delbruck, Hannibal, Jomini, Mahan, and Moltke. While serving temporarily in Germany in 1922, Krueger gained access to the German War Archives where he examined military documents from WWI. He found that much of the German Army's early success during the war resulted from decentralized command principles that enabled freedom of action and adaptation. Krueger saw utility in these principles as he later described that "the basic plan must indicate the general mission as well as the mission of the various forces employed, in sufficient detail to enable widely separated forces to cooperate directly or indirectly toward the attainment of the object of war. But the plan must not attempt to prescribe the execution of the operations determined upon."¹⁰⁶ Historian Kevin Holzimmer pointed out that while Krueger's opinions were commensurate with many Army officers during the Interwar Period, he earned a reputation as a military intellectual by clearly articulating his views.¹⁰⁷ Krueger's close study and openness to adapting German theories to the existing American style of warfare, reveals both results and change agility.

By the end of 1922, Krueger promoted to lieutenant colonel and became a member of the War Department General Staff.¹⁰⁸ As a staff officer, Krueger gained intimate knowledge of early Interwar Period war plans. He also travelled to the Panama Canal Zone in January 1923 to report on the state of the defenses there. Afterward, Krueger put his mental agility to use, developing exercises that tested the defenses of the canal and Hawaii. Considered a war plans expert in the early 1920s, Krueger continued to frequent the AWC to lecture on plans he developed.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 35.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

¹⁰⁸ Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 36-37.

¹⁰⁹ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 6-9; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 31-40.

At the War Plans Division (WPD), Krueger worked closely with other services on the joint Army and Navy Planning Committee (JPC). He received a unique opportunity when selected to serve as an assistant umpire to all joint exercises between 1922 and 1925. This made Krueger one of first Army officers to comprehend the key operational challenges to inter-service cooperation after WWI. He went on to write about the importance of unity of command and understood its role within joint planning as a senior member of the joint committee before WWII.¹¹⁰

Krueger's relationship with the Navy grew stronger by attending the NWC at Newport, Rhode Island in 1925. While participating in joint war games, he reflected on previous experience conducting offensive operations in the Philippines to think critically and make fresh connections planning for its defense. In his thesis, "Command," Krueger described his leadership philosophy. He wrote that the human element "constitutes the basic factor in the defense of a nation, and that is why no leader has ever been successful unless he understood human nature."¹¹¹ In the tradition of theorist Maurice De Saxe, Krueger used Hannibal's defeat of a numerically superior force at Cannae in 216 BC, to illustrate how to leverage the human factor in war. After years of historical study, he concluded that good leaders hold the qualities of calmness, charisma, ingenuity, passion, perseverance, resilience, and simplicity. While Krueger believed a good leader is born with these characteristics, he argued that all leaders must strive to become the best they can possibly be. In his thesis, Krueger highlighted the importance of rigorous study of other's

¹¹⁰ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 9-15; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 37-41.

¹¹¹ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 18-22; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 40.

experiences, arguing that this practice leads to self-awareness and allows the mitigation of poor qualities, cultivation of good ones, and better followership.¹¹²

Krueger saw how the dynamic nature of warfare limits a commander's span of control. In line with contemporary mission command principles, he identified that cohesion, discipline, and concise expression of purpose, allows subordinates to function effectively. At the root of discipline, Krueger saw obedience derived from "personal pride, esprit de corps, sense of duty, loyalty to the commander, patriotism, or religious fanaticism."¹¹³ To instill discipline, he recommended that leaders take an approach that balances severe punishment and positive reinforcement. To achieve cohesion and discipline, he wrote that indoctrination "knits all the parts of the military force together in intellectual bonds."¹¹⁴

So much depends upon chance and the intelligent understanding of the will of the command by subordinate commanders, especially by those at a distance and perhaps faced by a situation that the command had not foreseen, that organization and training, i.e., the acquisition of cohesion through practice, do not suffice. Something more must be provided to make assurance of success doubly sure. This something more is indoctrination, which is the keystone of all military action and therefore the basis of all training as well.¹¹⁵

Throughout "Command," Krueger acknowledged the importance of initiative. He wrote, "boldness is the noblest virtue of a commander, but the higher his position, the more necessary it is that this boldness be paired with a superior mentality."¹¹⁶ Similar to the exercise of disciplined initiative and acceptance of prudent risk, Krueger described how initiative should be "coupled

¹¹² Walter Krueger, "Command" (thesis, US Naval War College, 1925), 2-16; John H. McDonald, "General Walter Krueger: A Case Study in Operational Command" (Master's thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, 1989), 20-22.

¹¹³ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 18-22; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 41-42.

¹¹⁴ Krueger, "Command," 5; McDonald, "General Walter Krueger," 20-22.

¹¹⁵ Krueger, "Command," 5; McDonald, "General Walter Krueger," 20-22.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

with caution.”¹¹⁷ He believed that disciplined and indoctrinated soldiers hold the qualities necessary to act “boldly” and uniformly within the commander’s intent. Krueger’s descriptions of initiative and intent share much in common with the exercise of disciplined initiative as described in the modern US Army’s mission command philosophy.¹¹⁸

In “Command,” Krueger defined unity of command as “the right or power of the command to control all the forces that can and must be made available for attaining success.”¹¹⁹ Understanding the importance of vicarious experiences, he used historical examples to display how the absence of unity of command during military operations led to defeat or disaster. Krueger forecasted the need for unity of command within future joint operations by writing that “unity of command or at the very least, unity of strategic direction should undoubtedly be provided.”¹²⁰

After departing Rhode Island, Krueger briefly served as second in command of the 22nd Infantry Regiment, before spreading his wings in the air domain. Already well known in the Army and gaining notoriety in the Navy by 1926, the new Chief of the Air Corps recruited Krueger to serve as a senior officer within the expanding service. The assignment required qualification as an Army aviator, leading forty-five-year-old Krueger to attend flight school. During training, Krueger developed neuritis in his right arm, and failed to complete the program. Disappointed, he returned to the NWC and served as a faculty member for four years. Reaching back to his experiences in the Philippines and at the WPD, Krueger strengthened mental agility by developing a joint war game scenario to regain control of the Philippines. Krueger enjoyed his

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ ADP 6-0, 1.

¹¹⁹ Krueger, “Command,” 5; McDonald, “General Walter Krueger,” 20-22.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

return to the NWC. He taught military history, discussed joint operations and leadership philosophy, fostered personal relationships, and continued a pattern of rigorous self-study. After serving at the NWC, Krueger received a glowing letter of achievement highlighting his thoroughness, sound judgment, keen initiative, and suitability for future service in the joint community.¹²¹

Promoted to regular army colonel in June 1932, Krueger left Newport to command 6th Infantry Regiment at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Krueger relied on battlefield circulation to assess discipline and indoctrination of his unit. Well known for the inspections he conducted of the regiment, nothing escaped his keen eyes. Demonstrating people and results agility, he led by personal example, set high standards, and demanded realistic training.¹²²

In 1934, Krueger wrote to a peer at the NWC that he feared his study of joint operations were to “a considerable extent, a waste of time.”¹²³ At fifty-one-years of age, Krueger worried his non-typical experience with the Navy remained unappreciated in the Army and could prevent further advancement. However, he returned to the WPD in the summer of 1934 to serve as its executive officer and the senior Army member of the JPC. Promoted to brigadier general in May 1936, Krueger assumed the role of Chief, WPD and relied upon his previous experiences over the next four years as he led the planning effort for America’s involvement in WWII. Recognizing the changing nature of the global operating environment, he understood that US war plans required detailed revision. Krueger led the simplification of existing plans by reducing the number of classified documents distributed to the Army and the Navy. He also increased

¹²¹ Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 9-29; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 47-61.

¹²² Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 9-29; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 48-61.

¹²³ Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 49.

flexibility within each plan for the conduct of offensive action and stressed rapid reinforcement of the garrisons at Hawaii, Panama, and the US West Coast. War Plan Orange (Japan) acknowledged that the Army and Navy would assume risk in the Philippines by only committing locally available forces in the event of war. Krueger estimated that in the event of war with Japan, the United States would have to conduct a steady and progressive advance through the Marshall and Caroline Islands to regain control of the Philippines. Throughout the process of updating US war plans, Krueger increased his change, mental, and results agility by becoming more comfortable with potential joint operations and leading change.¹²⁴

Along with updating the existing US operational plans as Chief, WPD, Krueger analyzed past and present relations between the Army and Navy to determine what methods and principles should govern future relations between the two services. He recommended that the War Department increase opportunities for contact between Army and Navy officers by exchanging officers and instructors at the staff schools, increasing the frequency of joint exercises, organizing joint staffs for all joint exercises, and detailing officers for limited periods of service within other service organizations. Krueger believed unity of command to be crucial during the conduct of joint operations; however, to overcome this concern, he did not support the creation of a unified armed service.¹²⁵

In July 1938, Krueger relinquished his position at WPD to Brigadier General George C. Marshall before commanding the 16th Infantry Brigade at Fort George Meade, Maryland. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt considered both Krueger and Marshall as possible replacements for Major General Malin C. Craig as Army Chief of Staff. Better known by senior

¹²⁴ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 9-29; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 52-61.

¹²⁵ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 30-94; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 54-56.

leadership, and recommended by Craig, the position went to Marshall instead of Krueger. By 1939, Krueger received a temporary second star and command of the 2nd Infantry Division at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Displaying change agility, he led the new division through multiple exercises that highlighted the speed and maneuverability of a novel organizational concept, the triangular motorized division. Reflecting on what he learned during experimentation and training, Krueger made several recommendations that contributed to the conversion of existing and future mobilized divisions.¹²⁶

In 1940, Krueger served as commander of IX Corps during the army's first ever corps versus corps exercise against Major General Walter Short's IV Corps. In August, he commanded the VIII Corps during another series of exercises that integrated both Regular and National Guard divisions. The US Army benefited greatly from the exercises as it continued to integrate modern technology and adapt to a new style of combined arms maneuver warfare. In Krueger's final assessment of the VIII Corps, he noted that the organization's ineffectiveness resulted from the varied makeup of the staff and its lack of training prior to the exercise. Granted a third star in April 1941, Krueger went on to command the newly formed Third Army.¹²⁷

In the fall of 1941, Krueger's Third Army culminated many months of training by fighting Lieutenant General Ben Lear's Second Army during the General Headquarters' (GHQ) Louisiana Maneuvers. The GHQ maneuvers were the largest and most realistic peacetime military exercises ever conducted by the US Army. During the first phase of the 1941 maneuvers, Krueger championed the use of close air support and successfully blocked Lear's Second Army. Displaying initiative, he re-oriented his Army from a northeast to northwest axis, and directed a

¹²⁶ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 6-8; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 62-69.

¹²⁷ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 6-8; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 62-94.

series of reverses on Lear's forces to include sending the motorized 1st Cavalry Division around the Second Army flank to disrupt the rear area. Krueger then followed with the remainder of Third Army to counterattack and trap Lear's forces at the Red River.¹²⁸

After the first phase, Krueger's Third Army held a clear advantage over the Second Army. At that point, the maneuver director Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair changed the task organization of the two field armies. Facing the challenge of maneuvering a larger force during the second phase, Krueger advanced the Third Army on Shreveport, Louisiana, as Second Army delayed this action by demolishing multiple bridges over the Sabine River. Displaying both change and mental agility, Krueger responded by sending Major General George S. Patton, Jr.'s 2nd Armored Division on a wide flanking maneuver through Texas. Krueger's Third Army overwhelmingly defeated the Second Army.¹²⁹

Experience gained during the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941 created immeasurable benefit for Krueger and the US Army. During the exercises, Krueger demonstrated an unmatched ability to integrate close air support and ground forces while sustaining a field army over the course of several months. Krueger demonstrated change agility, using untested doctrine and a new organizational construct to outmaneuver a thinking, adapting, and equally capable enemy. During the maneuvers, Krueger displayed people agility by effectively teaching and mentoring his subordinates, as indicated in a letter he received from Brigadier General Dwight D. Eisenhower in

¹²⁸ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 6-8; Christopher R. Gabel, *The U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941* (US Army Center of Military History. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1992), 44-115; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 62-94.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

late 1941. Eisenhower had served as Krueger's Third Army chief of staff from June to early December of that year.¹³⁰

When he wrote the letter, Eisenhower had recently assumed Krueger's old role as Chief, WPD, and he sincerely thanked Krueger for his mentorship:

I not only thoroughly enjoyed working under you and deeply appreciated the compliment involved in your requesting my services originally, but I assure you that I learned a lot. I am grateful to you for the opportunities you gave me and for the consideration you always displayed toward me....

...I sincerely hope that the current pressure will be relieved sufficiently that I can write to you not only for reporting events, but to seek advice.¹³¹

Upon entry of the United States into WWII, Army Chief of Staff Major General George Marshall announced that operational commands should go to younger officers. In early 1942, Krueger wrote to a friend,

There's nothing that I should like better than to have a command at the front. I should love to try to "Rommel" Rommel. However, I am sure that younger men will be selected for tasks of that nature, in fact for all combat commands. I shall be 62 this coming January, and though I am in perfect health, can stand a lot of hardship and people tell me I look and act ten years younger, I do not delude myself.¹³²

Krueger had yet to learn that the highpoint of his military career awaited him as a field army commander in the war's Pacific Theater.

Frank "Jack" Fletcher's Interwar Experience (1920-1941)

Frank Jack Fletcher began the roaring twenties at the US Navy's Enlisted Personnel Division in Washington DC, where he cultivated personal relationships. Returning to the Asiatic Fleet to command the USS Whipple in November 1922, Fletcher witnessed firsthand as new

¹³⁰ Alfred D. Chandler, ed. *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years: I.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 16.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 97.

technology such as improved naval gunfire changed naval warfare. In line with Alfred Thayer Mahan's emphasis on the capital ship's role in commanding the sea, Fletcher viewed the battleship as the correct path to advancement.¹³³ In the 1920s, the Asiatic Fleet served as the US government's eyes and ears in the Pacific. Assigned to the 16th Naval District in the Philippines, Fletcher upheld an open mind and respect toward Asian cultures. Describing interaction with Asian counterparts, Fletcher told a fellow officer, "It is well worth while to get their point of view for a change."¹³⁴ Demonstrating change and people agility, he took a progressive stance for the period considering the ethnic prejudice that existed in the United States.¹³⁵ In 1923, Fletcher became commander of the USS Sacramento and travelled to Japan to inspect and pay for the upkeep of American graves at Shimoda. On the gunboat, he gained awareness of Japan's culture and military capabilities.¹³⁶

In 1924, the Sacramento participated in several small amphibious landings by local forces during conflict in the outer Philippine islands. Travelling ashore on multiple occasions, Fletcher relied upon results agility leading local Constabulary forces and US Marines pursuing Culum rebels. Fletcher coordinated naval gunfire from his position ashore and like his exploits in Haiti and Mexico, the episode revealed his eagerness to be near the action in order to inspire his team and gain better visualization. Later, he transitioned to command of a submarine base at Cavite

¹³³ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 39-40.

¹³⁴ Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 41.

¹³⁵ David M. Kennedy, *The American People in World War II: Freedom from Fear, Part II* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 208.

¹³⁶ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 40-44.

and the USS Rainbow, a submarine-tender. This provided Fletcher an opportunity to study submarine warfare and nurture his mental agility.¹³⁷

In 1925, Fletcher returned the United States and the Washington Navy Yard where many took notice of how Fletcher successfully motivated the civilian workers at the yard while dealing with the complications of labor disputes.¹³⁸ In July 1927, Fletcher transferred back to the Pacific to become executive officer of the USS Colorado. While serving as officer in charge on March 16, 1928 the battleship steamed into the channel of San Pedro Harbor, California while a civilian steamer named the Ruth Alexander headed out to sea. Navigating at night in poor weather, the two ships collided. While the episode served as a transformative learning experience for Fletcher, he remained confident in his actions and the board of inquiry cleared him of any negligence in November 1929.¹³⁹

Fletcher took a chance by applying to become a pioneer in naval aviation in 1929; however, he failed the flight physical, and instead received news of promotion to Captain and NWC selection. At the NWC, many foresaw a naval war in the Pacific would be necessary to counter Japan's expansion. Fletcher became discouraged as most faculty and peers failed to recognize the near peer capabilities of the Japanese military. Demonstrating mental agility, his experience in the Asiatic Fleet taught him not to underestimate Japan. Seeking an assignment in Washington DC after the NWC, Fletcher proceeded to the AWC in 1930 where he reflected upon his interactions with forces ashore, identifying a need for better inter-service cooperation. While

¹³⁷ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 40-44.

¹³⁸ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 45-46.

¹³⁹ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 45-49.

attending the AWC, he befriended Senator Claude Swanson who, along with his Uncle Frank, helped Fletcher advance quickly during the 1930s.¹⁴⁰

Fletcher returned to the Pacific as Chief of Staff of the Asiatic Fleet in 1931. Assigned to Manila, he primarily served aboard Fleet Commander Montgomery Meigs Taylor's flagship, the USS Houston as it moved between the Philippines, China, and various ports in Asia. Recognizing Fletcher's people agility, Rear Admiral Taylor leveraged this attribute to gather information regarding Japan's military operations within Manchuria and China. Under Taylor, Fletcher learned the importance of disciplined initiative, since Taylor gained the position of Fleet Commander largely because of his reputation for quick thinking and making sound decisions without waiting for approval by superiors.¹⁴¹ By January 1932, conflict between Japan and China became a direct threat to US interests. Fletcher gained recognition from the White House and US press as the primary voice for the Asiatic Fleet in Shanghai. In 1933, Fletcher visited the Japanese Naval Department and met with key naval officers in the Imperial Navy. Little record exists; however, Fletcher's dispatches reveal mental agility as he articulated the deterioration of Japan's long relationship with Britain and growing anti-US propaganda by Japan's military elite. Fletcher walked away impressed with the Imperial Navy, yet confident that the US Navy outmatched it.¹⁴²

Returning to Washington in 1933, Fletcher served in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) before the newly appointed SECNAV, Claude Swanson selected him as an aide. Trusted by the most powerful man in the US Navy, Fletcher held a platform for further

¹⁴⁰ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 46-49.

¹⁴¹ "Quick Thinking Won Taylor Asiatic Post," *Daily Boston Globe*. (February 1, 1932), 5.

¹⁴² Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 52-56.

advancement and leveraged this position to mentor and assist other officers.¹⁴³ In April 1935, Fletcher observed Fleet Problem XVI, an exercise involving the majority of naval forces in the Pacific that ranged from Alaska to Hawaii. The event culminated with a large fleet battle designed to represent actions during a strategic offensive to capture an advanced base in the Pacific. Afterward, Fletcher hypothesized with fellow staff members that war with Japan would require abandonment of the Philippines, Wake Island, Guam, Samoa, and Midway. As an aide to the SECNAV, Fletcher also helped secure 238 million dollars from the National Industrial Recovery Act for new naval construction—a critical measure as anticipation of a ground war in Europe overshadowed the potential naval war in the Pacific.¹⁴⁴

Returning to the Pacific in 1936, Fletcher took command of the USS New Mexico and led it to become the highest rated battleship during Battle Force competitions. In May 1937, Fletcher received a letter of commendation for the efficiency of his ship while refueling two other naval divisions during unfavorable weather conditions. Known for warmth, kindness, and a charismatic personality, Fletcher built mutual trust throughout his career; many sailors who worked for him recalled Fletcher's genuine concern for their well-being. Displaying people and results agility on the USS New Mexico, he gained a reputation as a superior ship handler and outstanding skipper.¹⁴⁵

Returning to Washington DC for the fifth time in late 1937, Fletcher joined the Naval Examining Board, before replacing Rear Admiral Chester Nimitz as Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Navigation. Nimitz trusted Fletcher and appreciated his vast experience; specifically,

¹⁴³ Frank Jack Fletcher helped fellow naval officer James O. Richardson gain appointment as Director Naval Communications under SECNAV Claude Swanson. See Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 56.

¹⁴⁴ Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 56-58.

¹⁴⁵ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 63.

his service in the Asiatic Fleet. Fletcher also developed a close relationship with Rear Admiral James O. Richardson who became Chief, US Fleet (CINCUS) in 1939 and brought Fletcher along to command a cruiser division. After deployment to Hawaii in 1940, Fletcher and Richardson assessed naval infrastructure at Pearl Harbor as inadequate for providing logistics, training, and repair facilities. Recent wargames and exercises revealed Pearl Harbor's vulnerability to attack by enemy aircraft carriers.¹⁴⁶ After continuous protest of the deployment, President Roosevelt lost confidence in Richardson's ability to command and replaced him in May 1941. When Richardson left the Pacific, Fletcher retained his command; however, his reputation suffered.¹⁴⁷

During the Interwar Period, Fletcher demonstrated change and mental agility by appreciating Asian culture and recognizing military parity between the United States and Japan. His willingness to lead from the front of his formation where he could experience tactical actions up close reveals courage and results agility. Continuously displaying people agility, Fletcher relied on charisma and kindness to build cohesive teams in every organization he served. On the eve of WWII, Fletcher held a wide array of personal experiences to reflect upon.

War in the Pacific Theater (December 1941-August 1945)

Frank "Jack" Fletcher's WWI Experience (December 1941-1945)

While travelling with his cruiser division southwest of Hawaii on December 7, 1941, Fletcher heard about Japan's surprise attack at Pearl Harbor. Shortly after the disaster, he took command of Task Force Fourteen (TF 14), a new aircraft carrier task force centered on the USS Saratoga. Many of his peers saw Fletcher, a surface warfare officer, as unprepared for the new

¹⁴⁶ During a major US naval exercise titled Fleet Problem XIX in the spring of 1938, Admiral Ernest King's forces wreaked havoc on Oahu by hiding aircraft carriers in squalls to the northwest of Hawaii before raiding Pearl Harbor. See Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 57-62.

¹⁴⁷ Farr, "The Historical Record, Strategic Decision Making, and Carrier Support to Operation Watchtower," 24-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 66.

assignment since he did not hold aviator's wings. However, at the time only a few senior naval officers met this qualification and most lacked his level of combat experience and knowledge of the Japanese military.¹⁴⁸

With orders to deliver a Marine fighter squadron, resupply, and evacuate as many civilians from Wake Island as possible, Fletcher's new task force departed Pearl Harbor on December 17, 1941. During the Wake relief effort, he commanded from a cruiser, the USS Astoria rather than the Saratoga. After the mission, Aviators on board the Saratoga commented that Fletcher failed to adjust the task force rate of movement whenever the carrier turned into the wind to launch aircraft. Later on, officers in Fletcher's task force described how he appeared to be in a hurry to get to Wake, as he routinely left the Saratoga behind, exposing it to submarine attack. Like his earlier combat experience, Fletcher's actions reveal his desire to lead from the front in order to visualize the fight, but beg the question whether this made him neglect aviation-specific tactical considerations, or if he simply lacked the experience to account for them.

Embarrassed about the disaster at Pearl Harbor, Admiral Husband Kimmel's staff hoped Fletcher could lure the Japanese into a general fleet action off Wake Island in order to achieve a decisive naval victory. A day out from Wake on December 23, Vice Admiral William Pye, who relieved Kimmel temporarily, decided not to risk the Saratoga and ordered the task force to return. As a result, Japan captured the island.¹⁴⁹ Kimmel's former staff officers saw Fletcher's strict adherence to Pye's orders as a failure to take initiative and a needless risk to US Marines on the island.¹⁵⁰ Upon receipt of Pye's order, Fletcher desperately wanted to relieve Wake; however,

¹⁴⁸ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 12-47; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 72-85.

¹⁴⁹ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 12-47; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 72-85.

¹⁵⁰ ADP 6-0, 4.

he understood the resource limitations in the Pacific and chose not to pursue a Mahanian-style fight against two combat proven Japanese carriers.

During the early months of WWII, Fletcher learned how to lead a carrier task force through reflection in and on action.¹⁵¹ After Wake, Fletcher accepted that Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor adjusted a paradigm in naval warfare by making the aircraft carrier the decisive instrument. Reflecting on action, Fletcher demonstrated change and people agility by relying on the experience of subordinates and adapting his approach during future command of carrier task forces.¹⁵² Demonstrating self-awareness and mental agility, Fletcher recognized his own strength lay in his experience as a task force commander and identified the strategic importance of protecting the USS Saratoga as Japan's carriers outnumbered the US Navy's three to one.¹⁵³

In January 1942, Fletcher received command of Task Force Seventeen (TF 17) and placed his headquarters on the USS Yorktown. Largely filled with inexperienced sailors, he led TF 17 through continuous training while sailing from San Diego, California to the South Pacific. This was Fletcher's first opportunity to reflect in action while commanding from a carrier where he could interact directly with experienced aviators. Along with Rear Admiral William "Bull" Halsey's Task Force Eight (TF 8), Fletcher's task force participated in the first US Navy carrier raids upon the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. Poor weather and lack of targets made the Yorktown's airstrikes on the southern Marshalls and the Gilberts largely ineffective. After a short rest at Pearl Harbor, Fletcher's task force teamed up with another carrier the USS Lexington and headed to the South Pacific. On the early morning of March 10, TF 17 launched aircraft from

¹⁵¹ Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, 26.

¹⁵² Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 12-47; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 72-85.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

south of New Guinea. Avoiding detection by the Japanese, Fletcher's task force successfully attacked from over 120 miles away. This required change agility for Fletcher as previous combat experiences allowed him to be near the action where he could clearly visualize the effects of his decisions.¹⁵⁴

For the remainder of the spring of 1942, TF 17 continued to patrol the Coral Sea while the Japanese gradually reinforced their basing at Rabaul, New Britain. On March 29, US Army aviators falsely reported a large amphibious task force at Rabaul. Attempting to control the naval fight in the Pacific Theater from Washington DC, CNO, Admiral Ernest King criticized Fletcher for being too far away to interdict a potential Japanese offensive on New Guinea. King reminded Fletcher of the importance of keeping the Japanese engaged to allow other US naval operations throughout the Pacific. Having better situational awareness than King, Fletcher found the report to be false and defended his decision to resupply TF 17 instead of moving toward the reported enemy position. At the time, he held the trust of the new CINCPAC, Admiral Chester Nimitz; however, never gained King's full confidence.¹⁵⁵

In May 1942, a large naval battle at Coral Sea became the first carrier-versus-carrier duel in history. On May 7, Fletcher made a bold move by sending Allied screening ships led by Rear Admiral John G. Crace, of the Royal Navy to attack Japanese transports in the Jomard Passage. This decision came under scrutiny since these ships protected TF 17's carriers. Fletcher chose to split his large force to block Japan's offensive toward Port Moresby while he maintained control of the fight against an opposing carrier force in the high seas. Admiral King continued to question Fletcher's decisions at Coral Sea, as TF 17 lost the USS Lexington, a fleet oiler, and a destroyer.

¹⁵⁴ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 48-84; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 85-99.

¹⁵⁵ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 85-132; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 85-99.

While the first ever carrier clash ended up a tactical victory for Japan, Fletcher's leadership resulted in a strategic victory for the Allies. Years later, Rear Admiral Crace agreed with Fletcher's actions by describing how detaching the screening force prevented invasion of Port Moresby and outweighed protecting TF 17's carriers.¹⁵⁶

At Coral Sea, Fletcher displayed change and mental agility by orchestrating his carrier task force without directly seeing his opponent's ships. Relying on naval aviation to fight over the horizon, TF 17 damaged two of Japan's larger carriers Shokaku, Zuikaku, and sank the light carrier Shoho. As a result, neither ship participated during the Midway offensive a month later. Like most forces during early combat, Fletcher's task force made many errors; however, reflection on these errors within the US Navy allowed later success. Remaining self-aware, Fletcher's actions reveal that he did not make the same mistakes repeatedly.¹⁵⁷

Damaged at Coral Sea, the Yorktown returned to Pearl Harbor after 101 days at sea. In May 1942, US signals intelligence discovered Japan's preparation for a major offensive to seize Midway Island. Admiral Nimitz saw this as an opportunity to achieve a decisive victory that could restore naval parity. After quick repairs, the Yorktown along with the USS Enterprise, and USS Hornet became a three carrier striking force designed to achieve Nimitz's goal. When the more popular and senior Rear Admiral William "Bull" Halsey came down with a debilitating skin condition, Nimitz placed Fletcher in tactical command of the large task force. Before the Yorktown departed Pearl Harbor on May 30, Nimitz wrote to Admiral Kimmel that Fletcher, "did a fine job and exercised superior judgment in his recent cruise to the Coral Sea. He is an

¹⁵⁶ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 132-204; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 85-99.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

excellent, seagoing, fighting naval officer."¹⁵⁸ Never losing confidence in Fletcher, Nimitz recommended him for promotion to vice admiral and award of the Distinguished Service Medal for actions during the first five months of war.¹⁵⁹

Positioned northeast of Midway on June 3, 1942, Fletcher instructed Rear Admiral Raymond Spruance to position TF 16 ten miles from the Yorktown where the Enterprise and Hornet's two air strike groups could bring a decisive blow when the Japanese carriers revealed themselves. Remaining nearby, Fletcher used the smaller TF 17 to conduct air reconnaissance and serve as a strike reserve. Throughout the battle of Midway Fletcher relied on signal intelligence and airborne reconnaissance to identify the enemy's composition and disposition. Catching the Japanese by surprise on June 4, aircraft from all three carriers destroyed Japan's carriers the Akagi, Kaga, and Soryu. Never aware of the location of all three US carriers, Japan's carrier the Hiryu launched a lethal strike on the Yorktown that led to its abandonment. Meanwhile, the Yorktown's air strike group located the Hiryu enabling a combined attack from the Enterprise and Yorktown that damaged the ship, removing it from the battle. After abandoning the Yorktown, Fletcher ordered Spruance to take over tactical command of the remaining two carriers. He knew that he could no longer effectively visualize the battlespace from aboard the cruiser, Astoria.¹⁶⁰ He also recognized that Spruance held the trust of the aviators in TF 16 and did not wish to jeopardize this important principle of mission command.¹⁶¹

Fletcher's success at Midway enabled initiative in the Pacific Theater to shift in favor of the United States as later intelligence led to the first major Allied offensive of WWII in the

¹⁵⁸ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 229-30

¹⁵⁹ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 229-30; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 133-49.

¹⁶⁰ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 236-301; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 149-78.

¹⁶¹ ADP 6-0, 4.

Solomon Islands. Already operating from Rabaul, Japan began to build an airstrip on Guadalcanal in June 1942. Japan planned to use the island to support continued expansion and to disrupt Allied lines of communication between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Seizing Guadalcanal would allow the Allies to control the strategic sea corridor and gain a foothold for future offensive operations in the SWPA.¹⁶²

Selected by Admiral King and Admiral Nimitz to command the newly organized South Pacific Area (SOPA), Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley would command the offensive in the Solomons. Promoted to vice admiral in July, Fletcher assumed command of Task Force 61 (TF 61) which included the carriers *Saratoga*, *Enterprise*, and *Wasp*. During the offensive, TF 61 would provide air cover and defend against a counter offensive by Japanese carriers in the high seas. In early July, Fletcher joined the operation's amphibious force commander, Rear Admiral Richmond Turner at Pearl Harbor to conduct preliminary planning for the first phase of the operation. Fletcher and Turner agreed that carriers from TF 61 would provide close air support for three days before pulling out on the evening of the amphibious operation.¹⁶³

Adhering to strict radio silence after departing Pearl Harbor on July 7, Fletcher received no update of changes to the operational plan he discussed with Turner. During TF 61's movement, Vice Admiral Ghormley finished his initial assessment of the SOPA and the planned offensive. He determined Japanese air forces around Rabaul to be too strong and advised postponing the operation. Unlike Turner's ambitious estimate, Ghormley believed it would take between one and four days to unload the amphibious force. This meant Fletcher needed to keep his carriers close to shore for twice as many days as initially planned. Fearful of Japan's continued buildup in the Solomons, Admirals King and Nimitz refused to compromise on the date

¹⁶² Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 302-25; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 170-90.

¹⁶³ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 308-42; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 179-94.

for execution with Ghormley. Flawed from the beginning, Ghormley's new plan gave Fletcher command of the entire expeditionary force as well as direct control of the carrier covering force. Lacking a clear command arrangement, both Rear Admiral Turner and the land force commander, Major General Alexander Vandegrift, came to believe that Fletcher would ultimately lead the operation. This seemed even more likely when Ghormley did not attend a final planning meeting known as the Koro Conference in the Fiji Islands on July 27, 1942. Ghormley never provided clear intent to his subordinates, who believed he would ensure unity of command during the operation. At Koro, Commander of 1st Marine Division Major General Alexander Vandegrift noted that Fletcher seemed nervous, tired, and lacking knowledge of the forthcoming offensive. Vandegrift probably arrived at the meeting with preconceived notions about Fletcher, based on disapproval of his perceived failure to relieve the Marines at Wake Island. During the meeting, Fletcher acknowledged that providing close air support caused great risk to his carriers and he would remain only until the second day of the landing. While he conceded to Turner and Vandegrift that operational conditions would dictate if any changes needed to take place during execution, he firmly articulated that his priority remained the protection of TF 61's carriers. The Battles of Coral Sea and Midway taught Fletcher that with each carrier, he needed to maintain overall aircraft strength. Reflecting on his days overseeing shipbuilding, he understood that new carriers took time to construct and would be unavailable until mid-1943. Fletcher clearly recognized carriers and their air groups as the primary strategic asset of the Pacific Fleet.¹⁶⁴

Landings on 7 August went well and by nightfall, Turner advised Fletcher and Ghormley that he had disembarked all of the ground troops at Guadalcanal. While providing close air support at Tulagi, Fletcher believed the invasion of Guadalcanal had encountered negligible opposition. Assessing reports from his subordinates in TF 61 from the first three days of close air

¹⁶⁴ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 325-78; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 179-94.

support, Fletcher informed Ghormley that aircraft losses and low fuel levels required him to move further out to sea. Seeing little risk to the amphibious force on August 7, Fletcher received permission from Ghormley to withdraw his carriers. After refueling his ships, he kept TF 61 out of enemy air-search range, but not more than twelve hours away from strike range of Guadalcanal. While awaiting Japan's responding carriers, TF 61 covered the approach of the escort carrier USS Long Island while it delivered thirty-one Marine aircraft for use at newly constructed Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. Remaining in regular communication with Ghormley, Fletcher always informed him when TF 61 needed to pull away to refuel.¹⁶⁵

Multiple issues arose beginning on the night of August 7, 1942 beginning with delays in Turner's offload, about which he did not inform Fletcher or Ghormley. Instead, when Fletcher's carriers pulled away, Turner withdrew his amphibious forces despite Vandegrift's objections. Along with the US Navy, Fletcher received most of the blame for leaving the Marines with a perceived lack of air support, and no reserve regiment, artillery, extra ammunition, medical supplies, or rations. In addition to poor coordination, on August 9, the TF 61 screening force under the command of Rear Admiral Victor Crutchley encountered a large Japanese force west of Guadalcanal. Surprised and outmatched by the proficient night fighting capability of the enemy, Crutchley lost four cruisers near Savo Island. Fletcher received criticism for failing to respond that night. During the Battle of Savo Island, his carriers were at the far end of their nightly withdrawal and had just begun to steam back to provide air support the next morning. Every action Fletcher took during the Guadalcanal-Tulagi operation made sense to those that served on carriers in the early days of WWII. Given the limited resources available, the carrier personnel realized they exposed themselves to minimum risk by making a quick run to an objective, launching a strike, and then quickly departing the area before the inevitable counterattack came.

¹⁶⁵ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 325-78; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 179-211.

On October 9, 1942 Vice Admiral Halsey—who had only recently returned from his medical recovery—supported Fletcher’s views contained in his report on the action at Guadalcanal, particularly the assertion that “Land plane bases and the operating units thereon should be available in supporting positions before the operation is undertaken at all. It is only by this provision in advance that the risking of carriers in restricted covering positions can be avoided.” Halsey recognized the reasoning for Fletcher’s initiative to move TF 61 further out to sea on the night of August 7. This lesson facilitated better planning for future amphibious operations that required carrier-based air support.¹⁶⁶

Over a two-day period beginning on August 24, Fletcher next took part in the Battle of East Solomons. Relying on naval intelligence, he positioned TF 61’s carriers east of Malaita where he could prevent a Japanese counter offensive. The engagement began well for TF 61, with the destruction of one of three Japanese carriers, the *Ryujo*. A large aerial fight ensued between a combination of TF 61 and Marine aircraft from Henderson Field and the Japanese carrier-based aircraft, resulting in the loss of twenty American and seventy Japanese aircraft. The USS *Enterprise* also suffered heavy damage, as did a US cruiser. Demonstrating results agility, Fletcher forced the enemy to withdraw before landing any troops which caused the Japanese to depend thereafter on nightly resupply by destroyers from Rabaul—the “Tokyo Express.”¹⁶⁷

A week after the Battle of East Solomons, a torpedo struck the USS *Saratoga*. Damage to the ship, along with a head injury forced Fletcher to return with his carrier to Hawaii. At Pearl Harbor, Fletcher received his first leave after eight months of continuous combat. Discussing Fletcher’s leave, Rear Admiral John McCain stated, "Two or three of these fights are enough for

¹⁶⁶ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 368-404; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 179-211.

¹⁶⁷ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 404-64; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 212-23.

any one man. A rest will do him good." By the time Fletcher recovered, he became the odd man out and did not return to the Pacific Theater until late 1943. For the remainder of WWII he served as commander of the North Pacific Area and after the war, he participated in the occupation of Japan.¹⁶⁸

Conducting defensive operations against a superior Japanese Navy after Pearl Harbor, Fletcher's actions as a carrier task force commander during the first nine months of WWII shifted the initiative in favor of the Allies. As one of the first American large unit commanders to fight in this new war, which involved the employment of equipment with many new technological capabilities and requirements presented Fletcher with significant challenges. Relying on learning agility, Fletcher overcame complicated command and control arrangements, lack of resources, and lack of experience and credibility with naval aviation. The importance of Fletcher's adaptation and successes, which outweighed his shortcomings as an operational commander in the Pacific Theater remains underestimated.¹⁶⁹

Walter Krueger's World War II Experience (1943-1945)

Walter Krueger received surprising news in January 1943 when General Douglas MacArthur requested his immediate assignment to the Pacific. He had known MacArthur for forty years and served under him in the 1930s at the WPD; however, the two men never held a close personal relationship. MacArthur respected Krueger and intended to leverage his unique joint experiences to enable inter-service cooperation in the SWPA.¹⁷⁰ At the beginning of WWII, Third Army held an exceptional reputation and along with Krueger, MacArthur requested the

¹⁶⁸ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 404-82; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 212-39.

¹⁶⁹ Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*, 508-16; Regan, *In Bitter Tempest*, 212-39.

¹⁷⁰ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 78-117; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 101-03.

entire headquarters. Krueger later described the value of Third Army's previous experience as it related to overcoming challenges in the SWPA.

The conditions we were destined to face in SWPA differed materially from those of Louisiana in novel expedients and improvisation of tactics. But the experience gained in the 1941 maneuvers was invaluable. The basic principles and vital importance of competent staff performance, morale and discipline, teamwork, efficient troop management, and care of the men were the same. Moreover, the woeful shortage of weapons and equipment of all kinds taught my staff and me how to do much with little and get along with what we had.¹⁷¹

With only three American divisions assigned to the SWPA in early 1943, the War Department sent the majority of Krueger's Third Army staff to the European Theater.¹⁷²

Serving directly under MacArthur, Krueger's new Sixth Army assumed duty as a dual headquarters with the formation of Alamo Force, a task force designed to serve as an operational command during joint and combined operations. Krueger later noted that until late 1944, "the inherent difficulties faced by my dual headquarters in planning and administration were aggravated by the command setup, which was a novel one to say the least."¹⁷³ As Krueger's biographer, Kevin Holzimmer described the new role, "Krueger was given the task of coordinating all SWPA operations by planning; integrating all air, sea, and ground forces involved; supervising its execution; and developing the captured area for future efforts." Quoting an unnamed historian, Holzimmer described how the new role, "gave him a pre-eminent position; he was first among equals."¹⁷⁴ Serving in essence as joint task force commander without direct

¹⁷¹ Walter Krueger, *From Down Under to Nippon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 5.

¹⁷² Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 102-14; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 101-05.

¹⁷³ Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 110.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

command authority over the other services working alongside Sixth Army, Krueger never enjoyed unity of command.

Distance also created challenges as Alamo Force initially served within New Guinea while the main body of Sixth Army headquarters remained in Brisbane. In February 1944, the two elements linked up and by September, Krueger disbanded Alamo Force making Sixth Army fully responsible for operations. Alamo Force's naval liaison officer, Captain Bern Anderson noted how the Sixth Army staff became one of the smoothest working staffs he ever witnessed considering Krueger's role as joint coordinator as opposed to joint commander.¹⁷⁵ Bringing some members of the Third Army staff to Sixth Army, Krueger relied on change and results agility to train a newly formed and undermanned staff for service in an environment different from the one that Third Army prepared for on the eve of WWII.¹⁷⁶ The collaboration that Krueger achieved with other joint forces reveals his leveraging of mental and people agility to contend with issues regarding distance and unity of command.

Operation Chronicle in June 1943 served as Alamo Force's first opportunity to contend with geographic, engineering, and logistics issues inherent in the SWPA. Krueger later described that, "Conditions in SWPA were in short unique. They differed radically from those normally encountered in war. They did not permit an army to conduct its operations with roads and

¹⁷⁵ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 102-14; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 102-29.

¹⁷⁶ Krueger took several members of the Third Army staff to Sixth Army including Brigadier General George Honnen, Colonel George H. Decker, George S. Price, Colonel Horton V. White, Clyde Eddleman, and Colonel Kenneth Pierce. As a result of health problems Honnen returned home by June 1943 and Brigadier General Edwin D. Patrick, who had served on the staff of Admiral William F. Halsey in the SOPA replaced him. Patrick did not get along smoothly with Krueger or the rest of the Sixth Army staff. By May 1944 Patrick took command of 158th Regimental Combat Team, and Decker became chief of staff. See Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 103.

railroads behind it as a line of communications except on Luzon, and even there to a limited extent only.”¹⁷⁷ Taking Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands unopposed, Alamo Force maintained momentum by focusing on the construction of roads and airbases. After heavy rainfall delayed offloading and construction, Krueger relieved the operational commander for ineffectiveness and deployed additional engineers to speed up the development of infrastructure on the islands.¹⁷⁸

After Operation Chronicle, Krueger realized he could no longer depend on traditional methods to obtain information when a joint reconnaissance force highlighted disparity between Army and Navy information requirements. While the Navy focused on hydrographic data near the shore, the Army concentrated on enemy strength and terrain suitability further inland. Unafraid to innovate, Krueger created his own organization focused on reconnaissance and raids to overcome the issue. Only top graduates of the Alamo Scout’s six-week training program became members; however, all that attended brought useful skills back to their units.¹⁷⁹ An exhibition of change and results agility, Krueger’s Alamo Scouts became a key instrument for developing accurate intelligence in the SWPA.

For the duration of the war, MacArthur’s GHQ limited orders to objectives, target dates, and troop allocation; therefore, Krueger and his staff did the majority of planning for each operation within the SWPA. MacArthur’s staff often relied too heavily on Ultra’s decryption of Japanese naval messages and displayed overconfidence in their intelligence estimates based on this signals intelligence.¹⁸⁰ In contrast, Krueger relied on a more traditional form of intelligence

¹⁷⁷ Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 105.

¹⁷⁸ Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 102-14; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 102-29.

¹⁷⁹ Eaton, “From Teaching to Practice,” 102-14; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 113-15.

¹⁸⁰ Stephen R. Taaffe, *MacArthur’s Jungle War: The 1944 New Guinea Campaign* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 230-31.

before taking action, as evidenced by his use of the Alamo Scouts to obtain information before an offensive to seize New Britain. The intelligence the Scouts acquired enabled Krueger to see that the operation required major adjustments as the main objective failed to account for Japanese strength or terrain suitability for airfield construction. He convinced MacArthur that the Sixth Army needed to adjust the guidance received in the GHQ orders.

When 1st Marine Division kicked off Operation Dexterity at Cape Gloucester in December 1943, operational tempo became a great challenge for the Sixth Army headquarters. Given MacArthur's offensive nature and desire to return to the Philippines before the Navy, Krueger found himself struggling to balance current and future operations. For example, in February 1944, an offensive to seize the Admiralty Islands progressed too quickly based on faulty intelligence that indicated enemy forces had retreated. Continuously fighting to balance men, weapons, and equipment, the Sixth Army had forces committed in eight locations and separated by over 800 miles during the operation.¹⁸¹ By May 1944, during the New Guinea Campaign, Alamo Force grew to include two corps with ten divisions; however, the speed and dispersion of concurrent operations prevented Krueger from devoting full attention to any one fight. Becoming increasingly aware of the inherent challenges serving as MacArthur's orchestrator, Krueger used people and results agility to incorporate subordinate units into the planning process while balancing his time between his staff and battlefield circulation.¹⁸²

During the campaign to retake the Philippines, the importance of collective experience became apparent within the SWPA. Krueger and many senior members of the army and navy staffs had previous experience serving in the region prior to WWII, and most conducted

¹⁸¹ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 102-14; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 113-15.

¹⁸² Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 102-14; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 184-208.

wargames that involved Philippine terrain at the AWC and NWC. Collective experience allowed all to adapt previous experience to the conditions faced in late 1944 and early 1945. To prevent any lapse in inter-service cooperation during the campaign, Krueger directed that members of his staff remain in New Guinea to serve as liaisons to 5th Air Force and 7th Fleet, which allowed free flow of information between staffs. In addition to facilitating effective collaboration, this enhanced Krueger's reputation as an expert in army air corps and navy coordination with army ground forces—experience that played a pivotal role in Sixth Army's operations. More of a joint collaborator, Krueger demonstrated people agility by ensuring that inter-service planning and execution worked smoothly.¹⁸³

Faced with varying intelligence estimates, the Sixth Army invaded Luzon in January 1945. Luzon provided Krueger the first opportunity to utilize the Sixth Army to conduct combined arms maneuver warfare similar to his experience during the Louisiana Maneuvers with the Third Army. Focused on fighting the enemy, Krueger maneuvered his force in a cautious but prudent manner. Unhappy with the Sixth Army's tempo, MacArthur pressured Krueger to speed up operations by bypassing enemy forces and rapidly securing Manila. MacArthur went to the extreme of placing his own headquarters forward of the Sixth Army's and attempted to incite rivalry between Krueger and Lieutenant General Robert Eichelberger by allowing the Eighth Army to conduct a drive on Manila from another route. However, Krueger remained resolute regarding his restrained tempo and focused on eliminating Japanese forces. Recognizing the capabilities and limitations of his army, Krueger displayed people and results agility by maintaining his composure throughout the affair and opposing MacArthur's demands. In the end,

¹⁸³ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 102-14; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 208-37.

Krueger's determination proved wise, as the recapture of Manila required over two weeks of intense fighting.¹⁸⁴

Only eighteen months after arriving to the SWPA, Krueger planned and executed twenty-one major amphibious operations for General MacArthur. While the two disagreed about operational pace and objectives during the campaign to regain control of the Philippines, MacArthur continued to respect Krueger. Recommended for promotion to General and selected to lead the invasion of Japan in the fall of 1945, Krueger's experiences before and during WWII allowed for his continuous development of learning agility and exercise of disciplined initiative.

Cross Case Analysis

As operational commanders during WWII, both Frank Jack Fletcher and Walter Krueger overcame complex problems by making fresh connections within the Pacific Theater. Relying on mental agility Fletcher combined his knowledge of surface warfare tactics with reflection in action to learn his role as one of the first commanders of an aircraft carrier task force in combat. Arriving to the Pacific in 1943, Krueger had the opportunity to reflect on the action of others before adapting the lessons he learned during the Louisiana Maneuvers in the SWPA. To demonstrate mental agility, military officers must hold an adequate level of experience in roles similar to those in which they will serve in the future. Fletcher did not earn aviator's wings before he assumed command of an aircraft carrier task force after Pearl Harbor; however, he demonstrated at Vera Cruz and in the Asiatic Fleet before WWII that he could critically evaluate new situations and execute creative solutions. Krueger benefited from experiences commensurate to the SWPA gained during his early days in the Philippines, his education and teaching at the AWC and NWC, his service in the WPD, and his command of Third Army. Both Fletcher and

¹⁸⁴ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 102-14; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 208-37.

Krueger displayed willingness to exercise disciplined initiative even if it went against a superior's views during WWII, but their history reveals that others' perception of an officer's previous experience matters when doing so. Officers who do not have previous experience in a position very similar to the one they currently hold often face criticism based on the perception that they lack preparation for their duties, and may lead superiors with whom they do not already have a relationship built on mutual trust to question their capabilities and decisions.

Both Fletcher and Krueger built effective teams in their organizations to overcome difficult situations they encountered throughout their careers, but they did so in different ways. They possessed different leadership styles, with Fletcher relying on charisma and kindness while Krueger maintained a rigid persona. Both officers showed genuine concern for their men and enabled discourse during the planning process, and they both understood that teamwork mattered most during amphibious operations because mission success relied on inter-service cooperation. Arguably, Krueger did a better job enabling collaboration; however, he benefited from the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of Fletcher and others who commanded during some of the Americans' first WWII operations. The two officers developed people agility while attending the AWC and NWC. In the case of Krueger, his experience as instructor and WPD staff officer gave him additional opportunities to grow people agility, which could help explain his effectiveness when working to enable inter-service cooperation within the SWPA.

Fletcher and Krueger both seemed comfortable with change. Each officer contended with modern technology and pursued service within new and unproven organizations. Fletcher, who attempted to command an untested naval vessel during WWI relied on change agility when serving as one of the first task force commanders to conduct carrier versus carrier combat at Coral Sea, Midway, and Guadalcanal. Krueger demonstrated this dimension by volunteering to serve in one of the army's first armored organizations during WWI, and later adapting US Army doctrine to the tropical conditions of the SWPA. Both pursued their interest in aviation organizations and

capabilities, and demonstrated the courage to discuss modernization within professional forums. Krueger proved particularly comfortable engaging in discourse on innovation through his writing about and field-testing of various doctrinal, organizational, and technological developments.

Throughout their careers, Fletcher and Krueger routinely delivered results in novel situations through personal presence within their organizations. This trend continued during WWII as Fletcher attempted to lead his carrier task force from a cruiser during movement to Wake Island, where he demonstrated his people agility by acknowledging the flaws in this decision and following the advice of aviators in his task force to command from a carrier rather than a cruiser. Krueger relied on battlefield circulation to check discipline and led by personal example throughout his career. Both officers found it difficult to maintain visualization during WWII as the challenges of commanding very large organizations required proper balance of time spent between staff and subordinate units. As Krueger's adaptation of Third Army's experience during the Louisiana Maneuvers to the SWPA demonstrates, Fletcher would have benefited from a similar exercise as a carrier task force commander before Pearl Harbor.

During WWII, Fletcher and Krueger both remained self-aware by reflecting on and in action. Fletcher's cautious approach in 1942 resulted from his understanding of the limitations of US carriers, his belief that the existing naval paradigm was changing, and a personal relationship with Admiral Nimitz. Reflecting in action, Krueger studied after action reports of others during the first two years of the war at Guadalcanal and Buna. He also ensured the conduct of after action reviews after every Sixth Army operation and widely disseminated lessons learned.¹⁸⁵ His practical actions in the Philippines in the face of MacArthur's demands revealed a keen understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the Sixth Army. Each officer did his best to

¹⁸⁵ Eaton, "From Teaching to Practice," 102-14; Holzimmer, *General Walter Krueger*, 113-15.

prevent repeated mistakes by remaining self-aware, and Krueger additionally built on a lifelong pattern of rigorous self-study and reflection to develop unconscious competence during WWII.

Conclusion

Experiential and contemporary learning theory sheds light on ways the US military can foster professional relationships and prioritize experiences within education and training that will increase learning agility. Fletcher's and Krueger's experiences reveal implications and support recommendations that will benefit the military as it prepares officers for future conflict.

Military exercises and other training events provide opportunities for officers to make mistakes without many of the consequences that occur within combat. As both men's careers reveal, these training events enabled the development of expertise that proved invaluable in combat. Fletcher was an expert in surface warfare and Krueger in combined arms maneuver on the eve of WWII. While the rapid evolution of aircraft carrier tactics that occurred after Pearl Harbor did not allow Fletcher time to prepare for his new role, if he had experienced a major naval exercise as commander of a carrier task force before Pearl Harbor he might have made fewer mistakes and been remembered more for his initiative and leadership during the campaigns of 1942. Conversely, Krueger capitalized on the opportunity to command the Third Army during the Louisiana Maneuvers. This allowed him to experiment with new technology and doctrine on the eve of WWII—an experience on which he reflected during his time in the SWPA as the commander of Alamo Force and Sixth Army. Examples of operational exercises today include Austere Challenge in eastern Europe, Rim of the Pacific in the Pacific Ocean, and Key Resolve and Foal Eagle on the Korean Peninsula.¹⁸⁶ Military officers that participate in these or similar

¹⁸⁶ Austere Challenge is an annual joint exercise that enables US Army Europe and other US European Command service components to plan and execute unified land operations as a Joint Task Force Headquarters responding to a crisis affecting the EUCOM area of responsibility;

exercises will benefit from these unique experiences if events require them to adapt to future conflict in those regions. Large-scale joint and combined exercises therefore prove useful not only as a deterrent against conflict, but also by providing military officers with experiences that increase their learning agility during future war.

The military must embrace the rapid dissemination of lessons learned to all levels within an organization. Krueger's study of after action reports from the first two years of WWII and his wide dissemination of lessons learned within Sixth Army improved both his and his organization's learning agility and ability to adapt to battlefield conditions. To enable widest dissemination of lessons learned in an organization, commanders must encourage subordinates to be transparent by acknowledging success and failure during daily update briefs which coincide with collective training events. By sharing this information within a forum of peers and superiors and allowing subordinates to accept prudent risk and learn from their mistakes in training, an organization will improve its ability to continue this practice at the outbreak of war.

Learning agility is a result of creative application of existing knowledge. Therefore, military officers must build a wide array of experiences over the course of their careers to ensure they are prepared for the roles they will assume in the future. Self-study and mentorship leads to self-awareness, enabling officers to accept critical feedback from others without reacting with anger or defensiveness, while realizing that mistakes provide opportunities to learn. As both Fletcher's and Krueger's military career reveals, it takes time to acquire the proper level of experience needed to exercise disciplined initiative in a new environment. Promotion of military officers and their placement into key leadership positions must align closely with their demonstration of success in a variety of experiences and not simply their performance in one or

the Rim of the Pacific Exercise is the world's largest international maritime warfare exercise; Key Resolve and Foal Eagle are simultaneous joint military drills on the Korean Peninsula aimed at countering North Korean aggression.

two types of organizations. In addition to diversifying officer's experiences by placing them within different types of military organizations, they must hold experience in multiple geographic regions. Without previous experience in the Pacific region, it would have taken longer for Fletcher and Krueger to adapt to a new environment during WWII.

Development of learning agility begins with the early assignments and educational experiences that make up the career paths that young officers choose to follow. The military—both assignment managers and educational institutions—must maximize the availability and variety of developmental opportunities available to officers as they mature and pursue new experiences. As Helmut von Moltke wrote, “It is self-evident that mere theoretical knowledge does not suffice, but that, on the contrary, the attributes of spirit as well as character attain a free, practical, artistic development. Of course, this artistic sense must be honed by military education and guided by experience, either from military history or one's own life.”¹⁸⁷ Moltke's words highlight the need for an experiential component to officer development. Recent commentators have questioned if the purpose of professional military education is to train or educate.¹⁸⁸ Some believe education should take priority over training. However, history reveals risk in emphasizing education over training when it sidelines hands-on, training-focused schools and assignments. Study of both Fletcher's and Krueger's careers demonstrate the benefits of a balanced approach to professional military education.

Walter Krueger demonstrated the trait of rigorous self-study from an early age. The military should encourage this habit in all officers not only at commissioning sources, but also by

¹⁸⁷ Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War*, 93.

¹⁸⁸ Jason Dempsey, "To fix PME, decide whether you are training or educating officers - and do it!" *Foreign Policy*, June 04, 2012, accessed April 04, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/06/04/to-fix-pme-decide-whether-you-are-training-or-educating-officers-and-do-it/>

continuing to reinforce the practice throughout officers' careers. Within military organizations, leaders must encourage the growth of their officers by challenging them through professional discussion and writing about military history, theory, and doctrine. For example, commanders should provide learning opportunities such as setting aside time for young officers to read about a battle or campaign and then apply current doctrine to what they read by synthesizing how the experience applies to the contemporary environment. Along with campaign analysis, staff rides take this process further by allowing the officers to taste, touch, and smell the environment they read about and discussed. Practicums offer another way to embrace learning agility by allowing officers to experience future roles under the supervision of their superiors in virtual worlds that Schön described as "relatively free of the pressures, distractions, and risks of the real one." This therefore allows the creation of a contemporary or future world that officers can use to reflect in their own action as opposed to the action of others.¹⁸⁹ While some may question the relevance of analyzing a historic military campaign or the use of practicums, the resources required for such experiences are often far more acceptable than a collective training event designed to achieve a similar outcome.

Analysis of the professional development and careers of Frank Jack Fletcher and Walter Krueger reveals that experiences increase learning agility and in turn enable the exercise of disciplined initiative. Continuous growth of mental agility, people agility, change agility, results agility, and self-awareness will improve US Army leaders' abilities to exercise disciplined initiative within unknown and complex operating environments just as they enhanced these abilities in Fletcher and Krueger.

¹⁸⁹ Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, 37.

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